DISSERTATION

EXPLORING THE COLLEGE CHOICE PROCESS FOR GAY MEN

Submitted by

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School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer 2022

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ABSTRACT

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This study explored the "lived experiences" of cisgender gay males and their college choice process. During individual interviews, study participants shared their experiences about their college decision-making processes, the variables important to their process, and if their sexual identity played a role in that decision-making process. Transcripts from interviews were reviewed and compared between participants for common themes and shared experiences using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. The study concludes with a discussion of the findings and a call for further research regarding the college choice process for gay men.

Keywords: qualitative, constructivist, gay men, college choice, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank my advisor Dr. Linda Kuk for her support, wisdom, and guidance during my doctoral journey. I would also like to express my gratitude and appreciation for the advice and guidance of my doctoral committee: Dr. Maricela DeMirjyn, Dr. Lisa Miller, and Dr. Jackie Peila-Shuster. I am very appreciative of your time and all of the ways in which you supported and challenged me throughout the dissertation process.

I would also like to recognize and thank the members of the 2011 Higher Education Leadership doctoral cohort at Colorado State University. I feel so fortunate, and honored, to have spent time learning from each of you and for what great professional role models you have all been to me. Thank you all for your friendship and support.

Thank you to my family, friends, and past and present co-workers, over the years, who have supported and encouraged me while trying to balance time and commitments with life, full-time work, and a doctoral program. I would also like to especially thank those of you who were my cheerleaders, sounding boards, and writing critics over the past few years.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, Don and Mary Fisher without their unconditional love, support and assistance this would not have been possible.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The National Center for Educational Statistics (U.S. Department of Education/NCES, 2018) reported that 3,674,130 students were expected to graduate from high school in 2019. These students use processes and patterns that may be informed by educators and mentors, or not, and related to how they select potential colleges. Their choices include entering the workforce, entering military service, attending a community college to learn a trade or complete general education requirements, or applying to and attending a 4-year college or university to pursue educational opportunities or career goals.

Deciding to attend college is generally considered a long-term, funnel-like process. Students start with a broad conception of higher education opportunities open to them, and through a series of steps, refine their perceptions in the choice of a single institution (Discenza et al., 1985; Dixon & Martin, 1991). While most students do not make the decision without the guidance of others (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1986), little is known about the key variables that influence student choices (Moody, 2020).

For most high school seniors and their parents, selecting a college has become an arduous task. Astin et al. (1997) found that students applied to more colleges as a group as compared to 30 years before the date of this study. This may be due to more information being accessible via college and university websites, electronic admissions application processes, and the numerous ways that colleges and universities can reach out to prospective student populations electronically through e-mail and social media outlets (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.). However, more research needs to be done regarding social media use (Moody, 2020). Students are inundated with college attributes to weigh and numerous sources of information to digest (Galotti, 1995; Jorgensen, 1994). Adding to these complications in the college decision-making

process, students must search for and choose a college within a specified time period (He et al., 2021), usually during the junior and senior year of high school. Prospective college students who experience these processes and challenges may be unable to compare colleges effectively or develop decision-making strategies. The college-selection process is complex and multi-dimensional, with many layers and intersections that may influence a student's choice.

College choice has been defined as the process a student experiences as they make the transition from high school to college (He et al., 2021; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Litten, 1982; Paulsen, 1990; Pitre, 2006). The college-attendance and selection-process is actually a series of complex, interacting processes (Hansen & Litten, 1982). Lewis and Morrison (1975) identified as many as 13 activities that occur in various sequences in the course of selecting a college, with some steps being repeated several times.

Studies of college choice indicate the ways that environment, institution, and student characteristics (distance from home, location, campus climate, program of study, etc.) may affect students' choices about which college to attend. The results of these types of studies have provided the fundamental knowledge base for enhancing the effectiveness of student marketing and recruitment activities (He et al., 2021). Research on college choice has also focused on understanding student college choice decision-making strategies. McDonough (1997) stated that college enrollment patterns depend on a self-selection process that takes into account many factors to narrow the range of colleges that a student considers. Factors such as academic ability, preparation for college, educational expectations (Alexander et al., 1987; Hearn, 1991, 1984), subject of study, institutional admission practices, family or work responsibilities, and family or societal expectations (Choy et al.,1998) have primary or secondary impacts on students' college choices. Govan et al. (2006), in a review of past and current research on interests in the area of

college choice, noted that one might expect a relatively refined system for accurately predicting the number of students who will attend a given college/university. However, no such system has yet been devised based on a review of the literature. Studies conducted during the last 50+ years have identified dozens of influences that impact the choices students make in the higher education selection process (Bok, 2017).

Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model of college choice provided a foundation for subsequent research examining the college choice process of a wide variety of students in relation to comprehensive college choice models. However, Hurtado et al. (1997) and Teranishi et al. (2004) voiced concerns that comprehensive college models, and the research associated with them, may not adequately predict or explain the college choice process of students from a variety of backgrounds, such as students of color, those of low socioeconomic status, and underrepresented populations on college campuses. Bergerson (2009) highlights the "trend in research that then emerged to focus on the experiences of students from varying backgrounds" (p. 6). This prompted a focus on theories that examine the experiences of students from groups that have been traditionally underserved or overlooked in higher education research. Among these underserved or overlooked groups are students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, transgender, or intersex.

Since the Kinsey studies (Kinsey et al., 1948; Kinsey et al., 1953), people have attempted to determine the number of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people in the United States. Some studies reflect that about 10% of the population in the United States is lesbian, gay, or bisexual (Lee, 2000), while other studies indicate smaller percentages. Eyermann and Sanlo (2002) discovered that about 10% of the respondents of a quality-of-life survey in the residence halls at a large academic research institution identified as being sexually attracted to someone of the

same sex, but self-identification—labels such as lesbian or gay—were not asked. Renn (2017) noted that while the number of sexual minoritized college students is not at all clear, lesbian, gay, and bisexual students are on college campuses throughout the United States, yet only scant anecdotal information documents their existence.

Youth are questioning and/or revealing their sexual orientation at much younger ages than before. The median age for coming out in 1998 was 13, compared to 20 in 1979 (Parents & Friends of Lesbians and Gays, 2001; Savin-Williams, 1994). Further, both Evans and Wall (1991) and Talbot (1996) observed that growing numbers of sexual minoritized students are coming out within the college environment, or in high school before attending college.

The current status of higher education research on lesbian, gay, and bisexual students offers an incomplete picture of their overall college experiences (Longerbeam et al., 2007; ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, 2001). Very little research exists on how LGB students collect information and gain their understanding regarding their broader college experience, including how these experiences may be similar or different from those of heterosexual students (Sanlo, 2004). Also, representation is a pervasive challenge in studies of LGB populations, partly due to various ages and stages of coming out (D'Augelli, 1991; Harry, 1986). The challenges are multiplied now that transgender students have been added to the mix, often represented as the T in the expanded acronym, LGBT, transgender students often have extremely complicated phases and stages of coming out. Bockting and Coleman (2007) describe the coming out process for transgender individuals as a complex process of engaging with a community to establish a new integrated gender identity safely while negotiating social hostility from society. More recent research has explored the never-ending process of coming out as transgender (Darwin, 2017). Researchers are exploring the development of the nature of gender expression and identities that

have emerged recently that are non-binary (i.e. use of singular they/them, ze, and Mx.). This shifts gender out of focus as a primary defining characteristic of a persons' identity and focuses on the importance of respecting people's wishes with regard to the way they are named and referred to by pronoun (Matsuno & Budge, 2017). This research hopes to lay a foundation for further research into these communities by starting with the most comfortably visible participants who have successfully entered college, which, while it is a notable limitation, allows researchers to gain access to confident, comfortable participants with the family support to step forward into college as cisgender openly gay men who can help begin the dialogue that is needed between college administrations and more socially vulnerable and/or socially inclusive target populations.

LGBT research (Abes & Jones, 2004; Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Dilley, 2005; Lance, 2008; Liang & Alimo, 2005; Longerbeam et al., 2007; Renn, 2007; Sanlo, 2004; White & Kurpius, 2002) holds promise that these minoritized groups are gaining recognition. Although problems of underreporting related to fear of stigma contributes to an overall lack of information on LGBT college students, as it has only been very recently that colleges and universities began creating safe environments for these students to openly express themselves through pride events (Garvey et al., 2017). Research suggests that openly safe spaces, such as libraries with pride markers, may be a motivating factor for LGBT students selecting potential colleges (Wexelbaum, 2018).

The lack of information about this group is one reason this population is often misrepresented and underserved in college and university settings, as universities struggle to tallying their numbers. Paulsen (1990) called for "a better understanding of specific student groups," and said that "further investigation was needed to determine the way various subgroups

process through the college choice process is unique" (p.78). Almost twenty years later, Bergerson (2009) noted:

> Another student population whose college choice experiences were invisible in recent research is the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender population. The assumption is that these students make choices in the context of their sexual identity, similar to the way that students of color and lower socioeconomic status must navigate the college choice process through their social identities. A better understanding of these choices would lead to improved services for them. (p. 113)

As universities seek to diversify their college campuses, better understanding of the college choice process of historically underrepresented student populations would provide insight and answers as to how high schools and universities can better address disparities in college going behavior (Squire & Mobley, 2015). This study seeks to dive into the processes that cisgendered gay male high school students go through as they consider colleges. To ensure equitable accessibility to top universities, exploring ways to entice these students to apply should be investigated.

There are many unexamined questions regarding sexually minoritized college students. While issues of sexually minoritized people have been identified in the literature, and while higher education literature has explored minoritized populations on campus, few studies in either of these areas include sexually minoritized college students or their particular needs or circumstances. In addition, no work was found in the literature that explores resilience, positive survival skills or academic success of sexually minoritized college students. Researchers suggest the need for rich, in-depth analysis of the day-to-day experiences of sexually minoritized college students (D'Augelli & Rose, 1990; Hogan & Rentz, 1996; Schlosser & Sedlacek, 2001). This

population has not been explored longitudinally, nor has it been inclusive of sexual minoritized students of color.

African Americans, Latina/os, Asian Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and differently abled students have been the focus in numerous college choice and retention studies. Freeman (2012; 1999; 1997) studied race factors in the college choice process for African American students and how to increase their participation in higher education. Pitre (2006) work focused on African American and White college students and their aspirations and perceptions related to college attendance. Perna (2006) explored the differences in the decision to attend college among African American, Hispanics, and White students. Martinez (2013) studied the college choice process for Latina/o students and how they navigated and accessed information about schools and worked with college counselors. Teranishi (2020), and Teranishi et al. (2004) focused on the college choice process for Asian Pacific Americans. Strayhorn et al. (2016) studied Native American college student and their sense of belonging at predominately White universities. Murray et al. (2016) explored the college choice process and the transition of differently abled students from high school to college and the need for systemic support.

However, the literature is void of such studies of sexually minoritized college students (Woodford et al., 2014). Further research is needed in the area of LGBT students and their experiences with their college choice process in order to provide an understanding of the many different variables that these students consider, their decision-making processes, and where they go to college. Such studies may provide insight to and answer questions about the lived experiences, decision-making strategies, and resources that these students utilize in their college choice process. Further research is also needed to understand how students move through a self-defined decision-making process to select a college or university to attend. Based on this

research, institutions, organizations, and agencies should be able to recognize, define, and create policies impacting students' college choices and help to predict where students will enroll and what factors or variables they considered as important in their college choice process.

The acronym, LGBT and other variations such as LGBTQ, LGB, and GLBT, condense broad identities of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning/queer experiences. These acronyms group and classify what are very different segments of these populations. As LGBTQ people have become more visible and accepted by society in recent years, a necessary dialogue has emerged between LGBTQ members and other segments of the majority population. This dialogue is becoming more fully an exchange, seeking less to group and classify LGBT people on the part of straight people and more to understand the diversity and complexity of experiences of LGBTQ people. This discourse also notes the power that language serves in reinforcing or challenging power (Iverson, 2012; Sorquist, 2014).

However, there are a number of problems with the term LGBTQ. The most obvious assumption is that all LGBTQ experiences and challenges are the same. As a note, the term LGBTQ will be amended for the remainder of this review and study, with the exception of where the terms LGBTQ, LGBT, (or other variations) are specifically used in the literature referenced. This research study is an attempt to provide a greater understanding of the "G" in LGBT and will focus solely on the experiences of gay cisgender men.

It is also important to note that during the course of this research, many terms were found describing and referring to "college choice." In reviewing previous research, the terms college choice, college search, and college selection were used, and sometimes interchangeably. While the term "college choice" is used in the literature and the introduction of this paper, the terms "college choice," or "college choice process," or "college choice experience" will be used as

well throughout the remainder of this paper. To understand college choice means to understand the participants' perspective and the many different processes and experiences that influenced the participants' determination regarding which college or university to attend. As such, these terms were employed throughout except where specific terminology was used in the literature referenced.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how cisgender male undergraduate students who identify as openly gay, experienced the college choice process.

Research Questions

1. How did gay cisgender male undergraduate student participants experience the college choice process?

2. What factors/variables did gay cisgender male participants consider in the college choice process?

3. What information/resources did gay cisgender male participants use or access in their college choice process?

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used throughout the study:

Bisexual - A term that describes a person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to people of more than one sex, gender, or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree (Human Rights Campaign [HRC], 2018).

Campus Climate - "The cumulative attitudes, behaviors, and standards of employees and students concerning access for, inclusion of, and levels of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential" (Rankin, 2005, p. 17).

Cisgender - A term that describes people whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Closeted - Homosexual people who have not disclosed their sexual orientations.

Female – This term is most appropriately used as an adjective to describe the gender of a person as being female regardless of their cisgender or transgender status according to the APA, except in situations referring to a transgender persons' assigned birth gender (i.e., He was assigned female at birth) or when there is a large number of participants (i.e. 1,687 females and 1,823 males) (APA, 2021).

Gay - A cisgender or transgender male person who identifies as homosexual.

Gender - A person's internal sense of self as male, female, both or neither (gender identity), as well as one's outward presentation and behaviors (gender expression). Gender norms vary among cultures and over time.

Gender Expression - How a person expresses gender through outward presentation and behavior. This includes, for example, a person's name, clothing, hairstyle, body language, and mannerisms.

Gender Identity - An internal, deeply felt sense of being male, female, a blend of both or neither. How individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from the sex assigned at birth (HRC, 2018).

Heterosexism - The attitude that heterosexuality is the only valid or "normal" sexual orientation. This can take the form of overt negative comments or actions towards LGBTQ people or subtle actions or assumptions that marginalize LGBTQ people.

Homophobia - Fear, hatred, or negative attitudes towards homosexuals (Weinberg, 1972).

Homosexual - An individual who is sexually or romantically attracted to people of the same biological sex.

Intersectionality - Originated with Black feminist scholars and activists emphasizing the intersection of their simultaneous and multiple identities and the ways that multiple forms of oppression (based on race, gender, class, and sexuality) all intersect to oppress (Collins, 2000).

Lesbian - A cisgender or transgender woman who identifies as homosexual.

LGBTQ - An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning.

Male – This term is most appropriately used as an adjective to describe the gender of a person as being male regardless of their cisgender or transgender status according to the APA, except in situations referring to a transgender persons' assigned birth gender (i.e., She was assigned male at birth) or when there is a large number of participants (i.e. 1,687 females and 1,823 males) (APA, 2021).

Openly gay - Refers to a cisgender or transgender man who is sexually and/or amorously attracted to other men and who has adopted the label "gay" to describe his sexual orientation. A man who is "openly gay" has disclosed his gay identity to others and makes no effort to conceal his gay identity. This study interviewed cisgender openly gay men as this demographic was accessible to the researcher.

Out - Shorthand for "out of the closet," a term commonly used to describe a homosexual or transgender person who has partially or totally disclosed their sexual or gender identity. Also refers to someone who is "openly gay."

Sexual Identity - How an individual sees their sexual self and how they express that part of themselves to others.

Sexual Orientation - Describes a person's emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people, often in relation to a person's gender identity. Some examples of sexual orientations are gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, or pansexual (HRC, 2018).

Straight - A slang term for heterosexual.

Transgender - An umbrella term that describes people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth (HRC, 2018).

Queer - A term some people use to identify themselves with a flexible and inclusive view of gender and/or sexuality. Also used interchangeably with LGBTQ to describe a group of people such as "queer youth." It has also been seen in academic fields, such as queer studies or queer theory. Historically, it has been used as a negative term for LGBTQ people. Some people still find the term offensive while some embrace the term as an identity (HRC, 2018).

Delimitations of the Study

This study was delimited to participants who were first-year, cis-gender male students, at public 4-year universities who identified as openly gay at the time they experienced the college admission process. Race, ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic status were not considered as part of the selection process for this study. Research participants in their first year were the focus of the interviews during the spring, summer, and fall terms, as their recollections may have been more clear and vivid as the experience was still new and fresh in their minds. The study did not include individuals who identified as heterosexual, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, or gay cisgender men who were closeted.

Limitations of the Study

The major limitations of this study include that this researcher only reached out to cisgender gay male students through the college administration and student groups for potential

participants at X, Y, and Z Universities. This affected the initial sample group of students and the participants selected, who may more strongly identify with their openly gay male identity. A second limitation is the expectation that research participants are being honest about the experiences they share and who they identify themselves to be, and that they are "out," or "openly gay," within their college community as of the time of this study. Each of these limitations influenced the possible future application of these findings. A third major limitation revolves around the timing of the interviews. Specifically, the fact that the interviews took place after the participants had already started school means that all data regarding their lived experiences had to be collected retrospectively. Although participants were recruited at a time when the memories of the college choice experiences were likely to still be relatively fresh, there is the possibility that some details of the experience were lost over time.

Significance of the Study

This study fills a gap in the literature concerning the experiences of first-year undergraduate cisgender openly gay male students at a public 4-year university who identified as openly gay at the time they experienced the college admission process. Very little research exists on LGBTQ student college choice. LGBTQ students may face multiple forms of marginalization within both K-12 and higher education environments (D'Augelli et al., 2002; Freeman, 1999; Howard, 2013; Kosciw et al., 2012; Squire & Mobley, 2015). This study aimed to assist varied stakeholders to understand the lived experiences of cisgender gay male students. Findings from this study were meant to inform efforts to develop affirming policies, programs, and practices related to the admission process and student choice.

Researcher's Perspective

Willis (2007) asserted that qualitative researchers must make every effort to acknowledge their biases and values. My identities and professional work history were potential biases in this study as well as helpful in developing rapport and understanding with the participants. I am an openly gay cisgender male working in higher education. I present as "openly gay" in my work settings with students, and I have worked with the queer community in higher education for the last 20 years. As a cisgender openly gay man, my own experiences create potential conflicts of interest that I mitigated through established processes of disclosure and reflection. While this study focuses on cisgender openly gay male students, it lays groundwork for culturally sensitive researchers in education to reach out to the other members of the LGBT community and find ways to make higher education more accessible to queer students.

The researcher is the primary data collection instrument and data analyst in an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study (Creswell, 2012; Smith et al., 2013). As a co-constructor of meaning with participants, it is important for the researcher to disclose any preconceived personal experiences and biases that could affect the study. Willis (2007) argued that qualitative researchers must recognize "biases and values to the best of your ability and acknowledge them" (p. 210). This researcher identifies as a gay cisgender male and has worked in different student services positions in higher education for over 20 years. I have had an opportunity to work with undergraduate students who identify as gay cisgender men in the different administrative positions I have held. Exposure and experience working with these students has helped me to have an anecdotal understanding of their experiences and to build rapport and trust with them in this research study. I have made myself aware that I am actively researching a community I am a part of with my own retrospective experiences that may

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influence my interpretations. As such, IPA was selected in order to ensure that I went through rigorous reflection and reviewing of data and draw out detailed interpretation.

Summary

This chapter provided the context in which the proposed study is situated. This chapter also included the research statement, purpose and significance of the study, the research questions, the need for the study, study delimitations and limitations, and operational definitions. Chapter two will provide a review of relevant literature related to the purpose of the study. Chapter three will detail the methodology of the proposed study, including the research design, description of participants, data collection and analysis, and strategies to ensure quality in the research. Chapter four will present the results of the study highlighting the participants' college choice process, their decision-making strategies, the resources they utilized, and factors that contributed to their specific choice of which college to attend. Chapter five will provide a discussion of the results in relation to the literature reviewed and research questions used to guide the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter Two discusses the history of the college choice experience and research studies included as part of the college choice literature. Theories and models of college choice are also presented, as well as issues with comprehensive models of college choice. The review of literature continues by discussing past research and more current studies about issues facing LGBT students, campus climate research, sexual identity and intersectionality, and a summary of the findings from previous research studies on gay men and their college choice process.

College Choice

The study of college choice for individual students indicates the ways that environmental, institutional, and student characteristics (distance from home, location, campus climate, program of study) may affect students' choices about which college to attend. Historically, the college choice process was framed by three perspectives: sociological, psychological, and economic (Paulsen, 1990).

The sociological perspective focused on college choice as part of the status-attainment process, with emphasis on individual background factors that influence the decision of whether and where to go to college. Background factors included race and ethnicity (Manski et al., 1983), family income (St. John, 1990), parent educational attainment (Manski et al., 1983), peer groups (Manski et al., 1983) school contexts (Alwin & Otto, 1997; Lee & Ekstrom, 1987), parental expectation (Attinasi, 1989; Litten & Hall, 1989), student and parent educational aspirations (Borus and Carpenter, 1984), academic achievement (St. John, 1990), and high school curriculum (Borus & Carpenter, 1984; Hearn, 1984). In studies framed by the sociological perspective, researchers found that student background characteristics have a significant impact

on students' postsecondary choices, both in developing college predisposition and influencing their institutional choices (Alwin & Otto, 1977; Attinasi, 1989; Bergerson, 2009; Borus & Carpenter, 1984; Hearn, 1984; Lee & Ekstrom, 1987; Litten & Hall, 1989, Manski et al., 1983; St. John, 1990).

The psychological perspective focused on the climate of the higher education environment and how perceptions of that climate influenced students' institutional choices (Paulsen, 1990). Authors such as Tierney (1982), St. John (1990), and Manski et al. (1983) found that institutional characteristics, including cost of tuition, room and board, location, curriculum, and financial aid availability, play into the psychological aspect of a college decision. The psychological dimension of the decision is driven by the interaction between student and institutional characteristics (Bergerson, 2009; Manski et al., 1983; Paulsen, 1990; St. John, 1990; Tierney, 1982).

The economic perspective constructed the college choice process as an investment decision in which students weigh the costs and benefits of attending college and make choices based on their evaluation of the economic benefits of a postsecondary education (Paulsen, 1990). Factors that have been taken into consideration in this decision process included the real financial cost of attending, the amount of financial aid available, and the foregone earnings from a decision to attend college. Students' perceptions of the return on their investment also shape the economic aspect of the decision (Bergerson, 2009; Chapman & Jackson, 1987; Davis-Van-Atta & Carrier, 1986).

Historically, economic-based research argued that students are more likely to enroll in college when the perceived return on the investment is greater than the cumulative costs (Kodde & Ritzen, 1988). Additional research on the economics of the college choice decision noted

students' price sensitivity; they are less likely to enroll when college costs increase or financial aid decreases (Leslie & Brinkman, 1987). Price sensitivity to both increases in tuition and decreases in grant aid was accentuated for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and students of color (St. John & Noell, 1989).

The 1980s brought a focus on the development of comprehensive models, combining the sociological, psychological, and econometric perspectives, and their findings, to explain students' college choice processes. Chapman's causal model of college choice (1981) was based on factors that affected students' choice of which institution to attend. The model demonstrated how student characteristics (aspirations, socioeconomic status, academic ability, and achievement) and external factors (influential others, institutional characteristics, price sensitivity, and institutional communication with students) interacted with students' expectations of the college experience to determine both which institutions students would apply to and their enrollment decisions. Chapman (1981) stated that "The model was explicitly developed to "assist college administrators responsible for recruitment policy to identify the pressures and influences they need to consider in developing institutional recruiting policy" (p. 490). Chapman argued that understanding this complicated process would guide institutional efforts to communicate with students through the recruitment process.

At this point models began to describe the entire process of college and institutional choice. Chapman and Jackson (1987) developed a multistage model of college choice behavior that consisted of three major components: perception formation, preference judgement formation, and choice. The model provided estimates of the relative importance of a number of factors influencing college choice. The results indicated that prior preference for a college was the primary and paramount determinant of college choice. Davis-Van-Atta and Carrier (1986)

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developed a series of steps or stages through which students' progress from deciding whether to

enter postsecondary education to their specific enrollment decisions. Their goal was to "gain a

sound understanding of the individuals involved in making decisions about college choice and

persistence and understand the forces that consciously or unconsciously influence them" (p. 74).

They divided the college selection process into three stages: the inquiry stage, the application

stage, and the enrollment stage. The researchers examined those stages through the perspectives

of three groups: prospective students, those responsible for an institution's enrollment

management program, and the institutional research office. Their conclusions were that each

group provided information regarding a set of distinct but interrelated processes including

research into the nature of these processes and the development of more accurate models. Their

findings would provide a knowledge base for more effective recruitment strategies, effective

marketing of the institution and its programs, image analysis, competition with peer institutions

for high achieving students, and a substantial common body of knowledge about the college

selection process.

The most widely cited model for understanding the comprehensive college choice

process was created by Hossler and Gallagher (1987). Developed through a survey of research,

this model identified three phases of the college choice process. The first phase, predisposition,

is a developmental phase in which students determine whether or not they would like to continue

their formal education beyond high school. Students' decision to attend college is based on

influences such as socioeconomic status, parental involvement, peers, and interactions with

higher education institutions, significant others, high school involvement, and the relative value

placed on attending college. The second phase, search, is one in which higher education

institutions supply potential students with information to assist in the decision process and

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students use this information to determine choice sets. The third phase is choice, in which

students select an institution and complete the enrollment process (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

In 1990, the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) published, "College

choice: Understanding student enrollment behavior." This report included summaries of past

research regarding college choice behavior, enrollment behavior, college choice and individual

students, models/stages of college choice, and conclusions and recommendations for future

research of students' enrollment behaviors. This report also examined the major literature

addressing the factors and processes students use in choosing a college.

Paulsen (1990) examined the changing marketplace, the new consumer, marketing

concepts, the interactions of student institutional characteristics, and the stages of college choice.

The college choice literature reviewed by Paulsen supported an emphasis on the factors that

influence college choice decisions, the processes students use to make those decisions, and the

social, psychological, and economic explanations for the impact of these factors and processes.

Issues of Access and Equity in College Choice

Since the publication of Paulsen's work, in 1990, the focus of much of the college choice

research has shifted to one of access and equity. Researchers, armed with a basic understanding

of the processes and characteristics that play into students' postsecondary plans, called for a

deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to the continued stratification in American

higher education (Bergerson, 2009; Azmitia & Cooper, 2001; Freeman, 1997, 1999; Kao &

Thompson, 2003; Perna, 2000; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; McDonough, 1997; Terenzini et al.,

2001; Walpole, 2003). This emphasis on equity became the umbrella under which three other

trends rested. The first was a trend away from comprehensive college choice models. The

movement reflected an understanding across the field that the college-going population in the

United States was growing increasingly diverse, complicating the ability of any model to define or describe the numerous and varied experiences students have in this process (Bergerson, 2009; Beattie, 2002; Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997; Ellwood & Kane, 2000; Hanson, 1994).

The second area of focus in the more recent literature was preparation for college (Bergerson, 2009; Perna et al., 2008; Pitre, 2006; Solorzano & Orneleas, 2004). Researchers have examined college preparation programs as well as community and school characteristics that affect students' preparation for college (Bergerson, 2009; Perna et al., 2008; Pitre, 2006; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). Within this research was a specific emphasis on access to information and academic preparation for college (Bergerson, 2009; Perna et al., 2008; Pitre, 2006; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). The final major trend in the literature of the last twenty years has been a focus on policy (Bergerson, 2009; Perna et al., 2005; Perna & Titus 2004; St. John, 1994).

An overview of the literature related to students of color and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds highlights a number of areas of concern. First, it is noted that many students of color and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less prepared for higher education than white middle- and upper-class students (Bergerson, 2009; Perna et al., 2005; Perna & Titus, 2004; St. John, 1994). Adelman and United States Office of Vocational Adult Education (2006) noted that students of color have less access to higher-level math courses in their high schools and that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds access such courses at lower rates than middle- and upper-class students (Azmitia & Cooper, 2001; Bergerson, 2009; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; Freeman, 1997, 1999; Kao & Thompson, 2003; McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2000; Terenzini et al., 2001; Walpole, 2003).

Another issue facing students of color and students of lower socioeconomic status relates to the economic approach to college choice; these students face particular uncertainties about the payoffs of attending college that strongly influence whether and where they decide to attend. Bergerson (2009) noted that, "Several authors (Cooper et al., 1995; Hanson, 1994; Mickelson, 1990; Pitre, 2006) focused on the level of aspiration of achievement of students of color and lower socioeconomic students" (p. 14). One finding of this line of research was the lack of access to role models who came from similar backgrounds and for whom college provided increased economic opportunity (Bergerson, 2009; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; McDonough, 1997; Terenzini et al., 2001; Walpole, 2003).

Many students had aspirations of attending college early on, but as they were exposed to others in the community for whom higher education did not make a significant economic difference, their aspirations declined. For others, lack of academic preparation and limited access to information about college played a role in their declining aspirations. All of these factors played into students' inability to accurately weigh the costs and benefits of attending college (Bergerson, 2009; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; McDonough, 1997; Terenzini et al., 2001; Walpole, 2003).

Comprehensive College Choice Models

Information is a significant element of the college choice process. Comprehensive models such as Hossler and Gallagher's framework (1987) emphasized students' process of collecting and assessing various types of information about postsecondary institutions. This research indicated that for students of color and lower socioeconomic students, information about college options can be varied and, in some cases, limited. For example, families with limited personal experiences with higher education (Grodsky & Jones, 2007; Ikenberry & Hartle, 1998), and lack

of contact with high school counselors (Gonzalez et al., 2003) were limited. Also, peers who were not necessarily college-bound (Perez & McDonough, 2008) and attended high schools with low levels of resources for college guidance (Perna et al., 2008) were affected by a lower understanding of postsecondary opportunities, including the costs of attending, and the resources available to aid in funding an education. Students of color and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, when faced with numerous choices, complicated forms, and unfamiliar terms and acronyms felt that this created a barrier for them and therefore created a barrier for students of color and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who choose not to go to college.

Bergerson (2009) noted that "all of these findings make the utility of comprehensive college choice models problematic. In particular, they challenge a fundamental assumption of these models—that students have equal access to higher education. The research examining the experiences of students of color and of lower socioeconomic status has shown that not everyone faces the college choice process armed with the same tools and opportunities" (p. 15).

The college choice research from the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s shows a growing emphasis on the continued stratification of higher education in the United States. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (U.S. Department of Education, 2005) reported that although the percentage of students participating in postsecondary education had increased for all racial and ethnic groups from 1974-2003, increases in participation for whites were larger than for Blacks and Hispanics, indicating an achievement gap between these groups. A more recent NCES report (U.S. Department of Education, 2018), using data from 2000 to 2017, demonstrates that college enrollment rates increased for Black and Hispanic young adults. The rates in 2017 were also higher than in 2000 for White and Asian young adults. Participation rates for White students

remained larger than that of other racial and ethnic groups. Research also found that differences in enrollment exist for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Beattie, 2002; Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997; Ellwood & Kane, 2000; Hanson, 1994) and attempted to explain these differences. Bergerson (2009) observed that "From the volume of published research exploring these concerns, the field is moving away from the notion of developing comprehensive explanatory models to a focus on access to higher education for students from a wide range of backgrounds" (p. 15).

Bergerson (2009) noted that "The work of several scholars found that students of color engage in a search process that differs from that of white students" (p. 15). For example, Teranishi et al. (2004) found that both ethnicity (for Asian Pacific Americans (APA)) and socioeconomic status had an effect on how students experienced the college choice process. Specific ethnic groups in the study population experienced significant differences in the institutional choice part of the process, with some groups heavily represented in more selective institutions and others in less selective ones. Further, socioeconomic status had a differential impact on the choice process of students from various ethnic groups, with higher degrees of variation in college attendance by socioeconomic status in Chinese students and lower degrees of variation in the Southeast Asian and Korean student groups. Ultimately, Teranishi et al. (2004) reported, "Asian Pacific American (APA) students from different ethnic backgrounds were not always similar in their college-choice processes nor were APA sub-populations similar in the factors that impacted their eventual college destinations" (p. 546). This finding indicates that comprehensive college choice models may not adequately predict or explain the college choice processes of students from a variety of backgrounds.

The work of early researchers who focused on the development of comprehensive college choice models represents an essential contribution to the field. Models developed by Chapman (1981), Litten (1982), Kotler and Fox (1985), Chapman and Jackson (1987), Davis-Van Atta and Carrier (1986), and Hossler and Gallagher (1987) framed ongoing discussion and research around the topic of college choice. Bergerson (2009) found that these early models had a significant impact on the processes students use to select a college, which was instrumental for this research. "Examining the influence of a wide range of variables in the process led the field to its current focus on equity, as we have observed, and begun to explain how variations in the influence of these factors apply to the experiences of students from diverse backgrounds" (p. 17). Although these models will undoubtedly continue to influence how the field frames college choice as well as the particular variables of interest to researchers, it is also important for the field to continue to generate research that examines the experiences of students from groups that have traditionally been underserved in higher education.

New Directions in the Research of College Choice

In 2009, the Association for the Study of Higher Education-ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education (AHSE-ERIC) published, "College Choice and Access to College: Moving policy, research, and practice to the 21st century." This book focused on student accessibility to college and a student's college choice process (Bergerson, 2009). This book also reviewed previous research on the college choice process, but focused on lower socioeconomic students, students of color, college preparation programs, and implications and recommendations for practice, policy, and research (Bergerson, 2009).

Bergerson (2009) noted "a student population whose college experiences are invisible in the literature is the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender populations" (p. 113). Bergerson

(2009) believed that "LGBT students make choices in the context of their sexual identity, similarly to the ways that students of color and lower socioeconomic status must navigate the college choice process through their social identities, and that a better understanding of these choices would lead to improved services for them" (p. 113).

Kern (2000) and Cabrera and LaNasa (2001) questioned how well Hossler and Gallagher's model fit students they called "disadvantaged" (p. 9). Cabrera and LaNasa called for intensive qualitative studies that would contribute to the developing body of research by exploring the in-depth individual choice processes of students from populations underrepresented in higher education. They also called for further eliminating systemic inequities that shape their college processes and decisions, such as socioeconomic background and social class in diverse populations of students approaching college-age.

To better address issues of access and equity for diverse student groups, in the college choice process, Perna (2006) developed the Conceptual Model of Student College Choice. This model "… allowed for deep exploration at pivotal intersections in the college choice process and helps to frame a student's multiple contexts and lenses for understanding the person's immediate and greater environment" (Moe, 2017, p. 17). Perna (2006) developed a conceptual framework for understanding college choice among students from various backgrounds. This model is composed of four layers of context, including the individual's habitus, school and community context, and the social, economic, and policy context. Perna drew from both economic (e.g., human capital theory) and sociological (e.g., status attainment, social and cultural capital) theories to develop the model, recognizing that economic and sociological lenses alone do not adequately explain decision-making in the college choice process. This model assumes that there is not one linear path to college enrollment to which all students adhere; rather, the model

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recognizes as an individual's "situated context" by examining one's habitus in relation to structural and societal contexts (Moe, 2017; Perna, 2006). An individual's habitus is nested in the larger stratum of context at play in an individuals' college choices (Moe, 2017; Perna, 2006).

The first layer, habitus, is composed of a collection of ideas garnered from membership in a given group or class of people, that creates an individuals' attitudes, expectations, and aspirations (Moe, 2017; McDonough, 1997). These ideas and concepts are situated within one's immediate environment and help inform and frame one's college choice (Perna, 2006). In the college choice context, social and cultural capital benefits students and assists them with making informed decisions about their college choice, whereas the lack of highly valued forms of capital can inhibit college access and choice (Moe, 2017). A person's characteristics, such as race and gender, play a role in informing the college choice process including sexual identity and multiple identities with which they may identify (Moe, 2017; Perna, 2006).

The second layer, school and community context, encompasses structural and organizational resources, supports, and barriers (Perna, 2006). Schools, classrooms, college counseling offices, community-based organizations, counselors, teachers, and advisors primarily make up one's school and community context.

> These students living in large cities or close to colleges and universities may benefit
>
> from non-profits that offer college advising services to low-income and first-generation
>
> college students or from federal programs housed at higher education institutions such as
>
> GEAR UP, or Upward Bound. Likewise, those students living in rural areas or those who
>
> attend large public schools with few counselors may encounter additional barriers to
>
> college access. (Moe, 2017, p. 20)

The third layer, higher education context, recognized the role that higher education institutions play in shaping students' college choice (Moe, 2017; Perna, 2006). Higher education institutions influence student college choice through the availability of enrollment slots (Perna, 2006). Some (Perna et al., 2005) have speculated that forces such as population growth and improved academic preparation for college may increase demand for higher education beyond the available supply of enrollment slots at traditional colleges and universities. An excess demand for higher education may cause increased tuition and or increased competition for the available slots, actions that are likely to have the greatest negative impact on students from low-income families, African Americans, and Hispanics (Perna et al., 2005).

The fourth layer, the social, economic, and policy context, pertains to societal and cultural forces, the economy, and public policy (Perna, 2006). This layer recognizes that the college choice process is also influenced, directly and indirectly, through other contextual layers, by "changes in social forces (e.g., demographic changes), economic conditions (e.g., unemployment rate), and public policies (e.g., establishment of a new need-based grant program" (Perna, 2006, p. 119). Explicitly incorporating the social, economic, and policy context into the model recognizes the connections between policy and college choice outcomes identified by other researchers (Kirst & Bracco, 2004; Perna et al., 2005; Perna & Titus, 2004; St. John et al., 2001). For example, Kirst and Bracco (2004) argue that policy "signals" emanating from elementary and secondary education and/or postsecondary education about college admissions and placement requirements, play a critical role in student's knowledge about, and academic preparation for college.

In addition to examinations of "college choice," Perna's conceptual model (2006) may also guide examination of such immediate outcomes in the student-college-choice process as

academic preparation and parental saving for college, or of such potentially parallel processes as the decision of bachelor's degree recipients to enroll in graduate or professional education. Perna's (2006) conceptual model may be used to test the hypothesis that a student's habitus towards college enrollment influences a student's decision to become academically prepared for college and/or graduate from high school.

In summary, Perna's (2006) conceptual model assumed that, although college choice is ultimately based on a comparison of the benefits and costs of enrolling, assessments of the benefits and costs are shaped not only by the demand for higher education and supply of resources to pay the costs, but also by an individual's habitus and, directly and indirectly, by the family, school, and community context, higher education context, and social, economic and policy context. By drawing on constructs from both human capital and sociological approaches Perna's proposed conceptual model would generate a more comprehensive understanding of student college choice. Through its multiple layers of context, the model incorporates the perspective of the four major stakeholders in the college-choice process: students (and their parents); K-12 institutions; higher education institutions; and public policy makers.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality, as a concept, was first "named" by Dr. Kimberle Williams Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality theory originated with Black feminist scholars and activists emphasizing the intersection of their simultaneous and multiple identities and the ways that multiple forms of oppression (based on race, gender, class, and sexuality) all intersect to oppress (Collins, 2000). This is key in understanding the perspective from which Black women view the world. Harris and Bartlow (2015) noted that "intersectionality refers to the way in which race,

class, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, and other locations of social group membership impact lived experiences and social relations" (p. 1).

However, Graybill and Proctor (2016) observed that there are studies regarding the relationship between LGBT identities and racial and ethnic identities. Intersectionality is not just used as a framework to examine the lives and experiences of Black women and other women of color; it is also used to examine the role that intersecting identities and expressions have on the lives and experiences of other women and men of color (Choo & Ferree, 2010). Scholars such as Cho et al. (2013) argued that intersectionality has expanded to a field of study to include, "investigation[s] of intersectional dynamics. . . debates about the scope and content of intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological paradigm, and . . . political interventions employing an intersectional lens" (p. 175).

Yet, this intersectional research does not often cross disciplinary boundaries and is typically deployed as a research supporting practical modifications in student affairs or other educational practice, rather than as social science research in its own right. Further research on multiple identity intersections is needed; however, researchers report that few models exist for appropriately measuring the relationship between or among categories which, for now, are treated in isolation. One of the key emergent discussions would be to strengthen the quantitative methodologies for measuring sexuality, race, gender, and class in the social sciences. According to Harris and Bartlow (2015) "studies of sexual behavior would also benefit from a much deeper understanding of intersectional experiences of sexual fluidity" (p. 15).

Tillapaugh (2012), in his original qualitative study and expanded study (2015), aimed to understand how sexual minoritized males attending colleges and universities within the United States and Canada made meaning of the intersections of their multiple identities, specifically

their gender and sexuality. Tillapaugh (2015) also noted that, "there is a gap in the literature on what particular critical influences in college affect students' meaning-making of their multiple identities" (p. 66). The following research question guided the study, "What or who are the critical influences during college on their meaning making process?" (Tillapaugh, 2015, p. 66). Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006) was used and interview data were collected from 26 sexual minority-identified cisgender males, 19-24 years old, who attended or had recently attended colleges and universities in the United States or Canada. Participants' journal responses were kept between the first and last interviews, and the researcher's analytical memos were utilized.

Four themes emerged, including involvement in LGBT-affirming spaces, intimate relationships with other males, involvement in leadership positions, and ongoing exposure to heterosexism and homophobia. Tillapaugh (2015) found that participants' characteristics connected to Baxter Magolda's (2001) concept of self-authorship, particularly on finding one's internal voice and using that to guide their decision making. Baxter Magolda's (2001) work "explored ways in which young adults made meaning originally with the external forces, such as one's family, peers, and teachers, to an eventual reliance on one's own inner voice" (Tillapaugh, 2015, p. 65).

For participants in Tillapaugh's (2015) study, patterns emerged around critical incidents or events of their college experience that served as movement points (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004) in their meaning making of their multiple identities. Torres and Baxter Magolda (2004) defined movement points as those influences that helped, hindered, or provided a temporary pause in one's meaning making. Tillapaugh (2015) noted that "while these critical influences played a role in the participants meaning-making of their multiple identities, these should be

understood not as positive and/or negative judgements but instead as factors in that process" (p. 67).

Tillapaugh (2015) concluded that "while this qualitative study provides an initial understanding of the critical influences of cisgender minoritized males, future research on sexual minoritized females as well as transgender students is needed to increase our own understanding of their experiences" (p. 73). By engaging in an exploration of these students' meaning making of their identities, increased attention within the student development literature helps to increase the knowledge of intersectionality within the student experience. According to Tillapaugh, (2015),

> Understanding the LGBT campus climate provides higher education professionals an
> important insight into the experiences of sexual minoritized students. Particularly at
> institutions that may not be LGBT-affirming, even in formal assessments of sexual
> minoritized students', their journeys can be illuminating in terms of understanding the
> ways that they are either supported or challenged within the college environment. (p. 73)

Tillapaugh also noted that

> higher education professionals must understand better the critical influences that inform
> and influence how young adults in college, particularly sexual minorities, make meaning
> of their multiple identities. Higher education professionals must continue to provide
> spaces, opportunities, and invitations to sexual minoritized males to engage in this
> meaning making process for their own benefit-- to see themselves holistically as they are
> in honesty and their own sense of truth. (p. 74)

Ung (2013) explored the intersectionality of Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPI) college students who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB). The purpose of her study was

to explore the experiences of Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual (LGB) college students at four-years colleges and universities by examining the intersectionality of their ethnic identity and sexual identity. A basic qualitative approach was used to collect data through ethnographic interviews with 21 API LGB undergraduate students at six local colleges and universities. Ung's findings indicated

> that AAPI LGB students experienced complex dynamics at the intersectionality of their
> ethnic identities. Students moved from an externally to internally defined identity through
> making meaning of and mediating tensions at the intersection of their ethnic identity and
> sexuality. Furthermore, college provided students with a safe and supporting setting to
> explore their identities. (p. 2)

In Crenshaw's (1989, 1993) works on intersectionality, she asserts that it is important to abandon any single-axis analysis of identity development and move towards recognizing all identities. Consistent with Crenshaw, it was important for participants to have recognized their own strength because it allowed them to acknowledge both of their identities with respect to their experiences (Ung, 2013, p. 128). Moreover, although many participants struggled with the intersectionality of their AAPI and LGB identities, self-acceptance helped them begin abandoning external influences and reaching internally defined identities like those in the Abes and Jones' (2004) study. For these students, college became a venue for new experiences that impacted their identity development, because college provided them with a safe space to make meaning of their identities, mediate tensions at the intersectionality of their identities, and grow (Ung, 2013, p. 129). Ung (2013) concluded that

> Though the conflicts of intersectionality create difficult experiences, how students
> confront those conflicts helped them learn and grow. Identity construction is intentionally

used as a way to convey students' understanding that identity development for them is a lifelong process, always under construction. "Acknowledging both identities by dealing with conflicts at the intersection of those identities allowed participants to recognize their existence as whole beings, rather than as people with compartmentalized experiences respective to their identities. (pp. 131-132)

Vaccaro et al. (2015) explored the challenges to understanding identities, demographics, and campus experiences of students with what they termed "minoritized identities of sexuality and gender (MIoSG)" (p. 25). Building on campus climate models, bioecology models, and empirical literature about students with MIoSG they developed MIoSG Students and Contexts Model to be used by educators in various postsecondary institutional contexts to understand and support students with MIoSG. Vaccaro et al. (2015) found 39 institutions of higher education that had begun to ask more inclusive demographic questions and encouraging students with MIoSG "to self-identify in two distinct capacities: through admissions and registration" (p. 26).

The first institution to do this was Elmhurst College in 2011 through its application for admission (Stoller, 2011). This research identified three undergraduate institutions (Elmhurst College, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of Iowa) as well as three law schools (University of Pennsylvania, Boston University, and University of Washington) that gathered sexuality and gender demographics on the admissions applications. In 2013, presidents from the Washington State 2-year college system made the unanimous decision to begin gathering sexuality and gender demographics through students' registration processes, which allows schools to capture self-identity changes over time.

Despite advancements at these institutions, there are still limitations that prevent the knowledge about determining the total number and evolving self-identifications of students with

MIoSG (Minoritized Identities of Sexuality and Gender) (Vaccaro et al., 2015). First, these schools represent only a handful of the more than 4,000 institutions in the United States. Second, the phrasing of the questions and response options are vastly different at these campuses, making data comparisons difficult. For instance, Elmhurst College broadly asks students if they identified as members of the LGBT community whereas Washington State's 2-year system asked students their sexual orientation and gender identity (Ingeno, 2013; Stoller, 2011). Finally, because efforts to collect these data are new, there is little agreement concerning the utility of the data and how to effectively support students with MIoSG with the information.

Research about the development and experiences of students with MIoSG has been mostly conducted at large, 4-year institutions and has been primarily concentrated on students who identify as some combination of lesbian, gay, or bisexual (Vaccaro et al., 2015). Vaccaro et al. (2015) also acknowledged the vastness of this literature which covered topics such as identity development; relationships with peers, faculty, and staff; engagement in MIoSG-specific campus resources/organizations; and experiences with heterosexism and homophobia (Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes & Kasch, 2007; Bilodeau, 2005; D'Augelli, 1992, 1994; Evans & Broido, 1999, 2002; McKinney, 2005; Pena-Talamantes, 2013; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005; Stevens, 2004).

Scholars have conducted research on students with MIoSG (Minoritized Identities of Sexuality and Gender) at more varied institution types. Patton (2011) and Patton and Simmons (2008) conducted research about the experiences of students with MIoSG at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU). Two studies have been conducted at women's colleges, where Holland and Holley (2011) examined gay White men's experiences and Hart and Lester (2011) captured transgender students' experiences. Only a few published studies have been conducted

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regarding the experiences of students with MIoSG at private, religiously affiliated institutions (Love, 1997; Patton & Simmons, 2008).

Understanding of identity and development for students with MIoSG in higher education has changed drastically since the late 1970s. Considering the field's evolutions from stage-based, linear models to more nuanced understandings of how identity is constructed within the context of environment, it is crucial to examine what is known about the campus climate experiences of students with MIoSG. A number of studies have documented unwelcoming and hostile campus climates and microclimates for people with MIoSG, as well as unique manifestations of exclusion by gender, gender identity, race, and role on campus (Rankin, 2003; Rankin et al., 2010; Vaccaro, 2012). As Vaccaro et al. (2015) crafted their model, they considered climate descriptions from previous studies as well as foundational works operationalizing campus climate (Hurtado et al., 2013; Hurtado et al., 1997; Milem et al., 2005; Renn & Arnold, 2003).

Vaccaro et al. (2015), drawing upon campus climate literature, bioecological models, and research about college students with MIoSG (Minoritized Identities of Sexuality and Gender), developed the MIoSG students in Campus Context Model to assist in explaining identities, demographics, and campus experiences of students with MIoSG at different types of institutions. The manner in which students with MIoSG make meaning of their identities and campus experiences is shaped by institutional context, homeplace, sociopolitical systems, and time.

Lewis (2017) studied the social and cultural experiences of gay and lesbian students attending an Historically Black College or University (HBCU). Lewis utilized Queer Theory to critically examine the meaning of identity, focusing on the intersections of identities and resisting oppressive social construction of sexual orientation and gender (Abes & Kasch, 2007).

Queer theorists suggest that gender and sexuality are socially constructed identities and how individuals understand or name their experiences with these social constructions is mediated by the self and the environment. Moreover, identities are fluid, and may shift or alter based upon the context of experiences (Patton, 2011).

Lewis found "four overarching themes that included acceptance of self, intersectionality, campus culture, and personal backgrounds. The theme of intersectionality represented the intersections of students' identities such as their race, gender identity, sexual orientation and their role as a student" (2017, p. 60). Intersectionality also represented "students overlapping or intersecting social identities and how systems of oppression or discrimination impacted their experiences on campus as gay or lesbian. Within this theme, there were examples where students clearly made connections between their sexual orientation, gender identity, and race" (Lewis, 2017, p. 60).

Lewis (2017) concluded that after analyzing the information gained from individual interviews and focus groups it was definite that queer theory aligned with the lived experience of the participants. Although more than half of the participants described negative experiences on campus related to their sexual orientation, three of the participants felt their overall experience at their HBCU was positive. The variety of experiences expressed by the participants aligned with queer theory and the notion of resisting oppressive social constructions of sexual orientation and gender (Renn, 2007). Gay and lesbian student's social and cultural oppressions at HBCUs result in unique challenges, needs, and expectations from the campus community that are different from their peers who identify as heterosexual. Gay and lesbian students at HCBUs require campus resources, institutional support, and spaces that are created to make them feel safe and welcomed, not ignored and silenced (Lewis, 2017).

Saxton (2019) examined the experiences of LGBT students attending high school in a predominantly Latino area to determine if their experiences are different in a Latino-inflected environment than those of students in a predominantly Anglo environment. This phenomenological study approached students after they have graduated from high school to see what impact their high school experiences of bullying and inclusion have had on their success in high school and higher education. In her study she explored intersectionality as it refers to the several ways in which social identity is constructed. Crenshaw (1989) believed that "students may identify as LBGT and also as Latino, Pacific Islander, Black, creating "overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and disadvantage" (p. 4). For Saxton, intersectionality refers to the complexity of a student's life if they identify as LGBT and as a racial, religious, or class/minoritized status as well.

When students come from an ethnic minoritized group, they may identify more closely with their ethnic identity than with their sexual identity. The overlap of ethnicity, poverty, class, and gender—referred to as "intersectionality"—also complicates this research. Holmes and Cahill (2005) in their research on high school experiences find that LGBT students of color face challenges that reflect the multi-dimensionality of their life situation. Yet the work of Holmes and Cahill is unique as they state that for all of the reporting on gay bullying, the majority of LGBT students in high school are thriving in their school environments, are proud of themselves and their accomplishments, have positive and productive coping strategies and tap into support groups or create their own. If they find no LBGT role models in the school, they create models out of one another. Researchers have not as yet isolated how these students cope with being members of a much-maligned minority. However, they do note in their study that students who initiated the Day of Silence with their State Legislatures reported a sense of empowerment by

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making a difference in their communities. Proctor and Groze (1994) make the case that the empowerment of the LGBT student creates a better climate in the school around the acceptance of the gay student in general.

Since the students in this study, like those in Meyers' study (2010), share the overlapping complications of sexual difference and ethnic minoritized status, his work is relevant even though he researches with adults rather than high school students. He underscores that the identities of the LGBT individuals of color differs from the white LGBT identity. The ethnic minoritzed identity individuals usually become more stressed than the white LGBT individual. But also, the ethnic minoritized individual becomes more resilient. In much of the resiliency research, it is an accepted fact that mental disorders originate with social stress. This study also questions the work that argues that ethnic minoritized identity wars with sexual identity, making the individual choose which identity they most wish to embrace. According to Meyers, the differences of Latino LBGT people and white LGBT people require more study.

As was noted at the beginning of this section on intersectionality, further research on multiple identity intersections is needed. A review of the literature shows that there is limited research and studies focusing on intersectionality and gay men. Harris and Bartlow (2015) noted that "studies of sexual behavior would also benefit from a much deeper understanding of intersectional experiences of sexual fluidity" (p. 15). There needs to be further research on the intersectionality of sexuality, race, gender, and class.

Campus Climate & Issues Facing LGBT Students in the College Choice Process

In the mid-1980s, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) Campus project began documenting reported incidents of harassment and violence directed towards lesbian and gay students around the country (Rankin, 2003). In 1988, 1,411 incidents of anti-lesbian/gay

bias, including threats, vandalism, harassment, and assaults were reported to the project (Rankin, 2003). When asked if "anti-gay violence had increased on their campus" since the previous year, 32 percent responded affirmatively (Rankin, 2003, p. 9). In an unrelated 1989 study, gay men rated the climate at the University of Virginia lower than straight men with regard to emotional support, intellectualism, change, and information (Rankin, 2003; Reynolds, 1989).

In response to heightened awareness of anti-GLBT acts of intolerance and to issues of GLBT inequality prevalent on college campuses, top administrators at several universities appointed task forces or ad hoc committees to investigate the institutional climate for GLBT individuals. In other instances, concerned GLBT students, faculty, and staff -initiated investigations. In 1998, a group of researchers used meta-analysis to look at 30 institutional reports generated by these committees and task forces at public and private institutions, varying in size and geographic location (Rankin, 1998). Campus climate assessments were conducted either in response to incidents of harassment or due to an awareness of a lack of equity, usually prompted by GBLT people on campus.

The methodologies used to examine the campus climate varied and population samples differed. Of the 30 college and university reports reviewed, 13 conducted surveys, six conducted focus groups or interviews, and five opted for a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methodology. Six reports did not indicate their method of assessment (Rankin, 2003). While it is difficult to compare investigations due to these differences, it is clear that acts of intolerance were prevalent on campus (Rankin, 2003). For example, in studies where surveys were used as the primary tool, the data indicated that GLBT students were the victims of acts of intolerance, including verbal harassment and threats of physical assaults (Rankin, 2003).

Qualitative studies documented widespread invisibility, isolation, and fear among GLBT people on campus (deHeer & Jones, 2017; Tetreault, et al., 2013; Yost & Gilmore, 2011; Longerbeam et al.,2007; Brown et al., 2004). This review documented that many LGBT professors, counselors, staff assistants or students experienced a constant fear that, should they be "found out," they would be ostracized, their careers would be destroyed, or they would lose their positions. While these reports indicate differences among the experiences of these individuals, their comments suggest that regardless of how "out" or how "closeted" they were, all expressed fears that prevented them from acting freely.

Research on LGBT Violence and Campus Climate

A major limitation of prevalence studies of anti-GLBT harassment and violence is that many crimes go unreported. Fearing further victimization, many GLBT victims do not report bias acts (Rankin, 2003). Therefore, the numbers of actual incidents of intolerance are probably much higher than reported (D'Augelli, 1995; Herek & Berrill, 1990; Rankin, 2003). This concept is supported by the findings of Rankin's review where between 50 and 90 percent of those who responded to several campus surveys noted that they didn't report "at least one incident" (Rankin, 2003, p. 10). More recent research supports the same findings (Coulter & Rankin 2020, 2017; Tetreault et al., 2017; White House Task Force to Protect Students From Sexual Assault, 2014).College campuses historically have been difficult environments for students who do not identify as heterosexual (Bieschke et al., 2000; Dilley, 2002; Rankin, 2003, 2006).

In general, gay and lesbian college students experience much higher rates of harassment, discrimination, bias language, fear for physical safety, and feelings of discomfort than their heterosexual peers at colleges and universities across the United States (Rankin et al., 2010; Willette, 2016).

Even though college campuses are thought of as safe places for diverse populations, campuses are often uninviting, in-hospitable, and even dangerous for LGBT populations (Draughn et al., 2002; Rankin, 2003). Herek (1993) found that many lesbian, gay, and bisexual people on college campuses live in fear of anti-gay violence and harassment to the extent that it affects their day-to-day behaviors. Research on violence against LGBT students on college campuses demonstrates that such fear is not unfounded. D'Augelli (1989) reported that among gay men and lesbian students on one university campus, 26% had been verbally insulted once and 50% have been verbally insulted more than once. In addition, 17% had suffered property damage, and six respondents had experienced extreme violence as a result of being gay or lesbian. Rankin (2003) studied 1,669 self-identified LGBT students across 14 college campuses and found that 36% of LGBT undergraduate students had experienced harassment within the previous year, including derogatory remarks, threats, anti-LGBT graffiti, pressure to conceal sexual orientation or gender identity, written comments, and physical assaults (deHeer & Jones, 2017; Tetreault et al., 2013; Yost & Gilmore, 2011; Longerbeam et al., 2007; Brown et al., 2004).

The issue of crime is not necessarily the key issue for LGBT students. A major issue is campus climate, whether LGBT students feel safe and supported, whether they are able to find friends, whether the faculty, other students, and university staff make them feel welcome, whether they are able to access services that are unique to their needs, whether there are role models who identify as LGBT (Angelli, 2009).

From Rankin et al. (2010), the State of Higher Education for LGBT people reported that, "practically all research studies examining the perceptions and experiences of LGBT campus community members underscore negative experiences from subtle to extreme forms of

discrimination." (p. 1). Multiple campus climate studies have been conducted but most occurred with only a single institution, a small number of campuses, a small group of individuals on a number of campuses, or a larger pool of respondents (deHeer & Jones, 2017; Tetreault et al., 2013; Yost & Gilmore, 2011). Rankin et al. (2010) claimed that their study was the most comprehensive national research study of its kind to date. This report documented experiences of over 5,000 students, faculty members, staff members, and administrators who identify as LGBTQQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Queer and Intersex) at colleges and universities across the United States. Rankin et al. (2010), explored how LGBTQQI people experience campus climate, reviewed participant's perceptions of campus climate, and presented behavioral (personal) and institutional (campus) responses to LGBTQQI issues and concerns. In order to capture the complexity of campus climate the researchers studied the intersections of racial identity and sexual identity, the intersections of racial identity and gender identity, and how such intersections impacted the experiences and perceptions of those who encounter multiple forms of oppressions. Rankin et al. (2010) also considered institutional position to examine any differences in the experiences of students, faculty members, and staff members and reviewed these differences as they intersected with sexual identity, gender identity, and racial identity.

Recommendations and findings from the Rankin et al. (2010) national study provide the means for campus advocates, program planners, and policy makers to implement strategic initiatives that address the needs and concerns of their LGBTQQI students and employees. Comparisons to a smaller scale student study conducted by Rankin (2003) were made within the document to identify if and how aspects of the campus climate have changed over the last decade.

Rankin (2005) noted that the challenges and threats faced by LGBT college students can "prevent them from achieving their full academic potential or participating fully in campus communities" (p. 17). She went on to stress that, although more campuses are undertaking proactive initiatives to protect and provide support for LGBT students, this population still fears for their safety and as a result, may remain closeted and less engaged academically and socially. Rankin (2005) also suggested that although institutional support, such as the creation of LGBT resource centers for the recognition of LGBT student groups, is important, there remains a need beyond "individual programs or enforced tolerance of LGBT people" (p. 21). Rankin (2005) proposed that a culture of silence reinforces the norm and that to truly transform a campus, LGBT people must increase their visibility. Rankin suggested that the efforts to create transformational change including establishing centers for interdisciplinary study, implementing cross-cultural teaching and learning, and fostering collaborative learning.

Research on Gay Men and College Choice

A review of the literature on the college choice process of gay men would not be complete without a review of studies that focused on this population. I reviewed studies going back, almost twenty years, to the early 2000s. A review of these studies and their findings follows in this section.

Taulke-Johnson (2008) completed a small-scale qualitative study on the lived experiences of gay male students in their final year of undergraduate study at a school in the United Kingdom. The sample consisted of six male undergraduate students who self-identified as gay. The age range was 20-23. One participant defined himself as Arab, one as Chinese, and the other four as White. All participants attended the same university which was located in a medium-

sized city in the United Kingdom, and were in their final year of undergraduate study, but were enrolled in different subject courses.

Semi-structured interviews took place which addressed the role, negotiation, impact and influence of sexual orientation on their experiences at university. Taulke-Johnson (2008) referred to Rankin's (2005) Campus Climate Study on non-heterosexual student experiences on campus, which reports that of 713 LGBT participants, 11 had been physically assaulted, 36% had experienced harassment in the past year, 89% had heard derogatory comments, 48% had been threatened, 39% had seen anti-LGBT graffiti, 33% had seen other negative written comments, 20% were fearful of their physical safety, 51% were closeted for fear of being harassed, and 74% perceived their campus to be homophobic. Taulke-Johnson (2008) asserted that participants in his study made "positive sense of their experiences, and... how through careful negotiation they were able to address, explore, and engage with their homosexual identities and orientation" (p. 121). Taulke-Johnson (2008) went on to "challenge the common and unquestioned practices of defining gay students solely on the basis of their negative accounts of their experiences, labelling them all as victims, and locating the entire population within a pathologized framework" (p. 121). Instead, Taulke-Johnson advocated for a more "nuanced and balanced perspective which acknowledges the alternate and non-victimized accounts of gay students to provide a more inclusive, comprehensive, fuller and richer understanding of the lived experiences at university" (p. 121)

According to Taulke-Johnson (2008), the six participants held positive views of their university and their experiences there as gay students. His study provided a different account of the lives of gay students on campus and called for related future research on the lived experiences of self-identified lesbian and bisexual students who would add to the knowledge and

understanding of diversity at university, as few projects have addressed these populations. Taulke-Johnson also felt it would be interesting to shadow gay students through their entire university experiences in a longitudinal design to detail the shifting and fluid role sexuality plays in their lives and the course of their studies.

In another study, Taulke-Johnson (2010) explored the intersection of gayness and university selection. Taulke-Johnson used qualitative interviews to detail and deconstruct participants' institutional choices, first in terms of class and then migration from and towards particular spaces. His analysis provided insight into whether gay students' decisions of where to undertake their higher education are influenced by their (non-hetero) sexuality, and also, in what ways and to what extent their gayness plays a role, and how their university choice process corresponded to and differed from those of their straight peers.

Taulke-Johnson's (2010) research included interview data collected as part of a qualitative study of the university experiences of 17 gay male undergraduate students attending the same institution in the United Kingdom. Reported factors included institutional characteristics such as the campus atmosphere (e.g., whether noisy or quiet, bustling or relaxed), type of university (i.e., whether old or traditional, or new/modern) (Soutar & Turner, 2002), and the institutions' infrastructure (Veloutsou et al., 2005). Academic issues referred to the availability of a particular degree or subject, the course content, the reputation of the institution and department, and career prospects following graduation (Moogam et al., 1999). Personal preferences included the location of the university, its distance from home, and the financial costs of undertaking a degree there. Recommendations and advice from schoolteachers, career advisors, family, friends, and both current and past students would also influence the decision of where to study (Brooks, 2003; Taulke-Johnson, 2010).

Taulke-Johnson (2010) suggested that these results of students' choices should be approached with the understanding that they are embedded within class distinctions. The participants' middle-class status meant that they had the opportunity to, were expected to, and did select elite universities that required geographic relocation from their home communities. Gay students from working-class families may well have very different university choice narratives. In addition to examining these, research could further address how other differences such as gender and race, interrelate with sexuality and class in these decisions.

Participant's' results of university choices were also characterized by "geographies and journeys" (Talke-Johnson, 2010, p. 259). Their decisions regarding which institution to attend and which to disregard were framed by deliberate and purposeful migrations away from environments they experienced as restrictive and stifling, and people they found threatening and potentially dangerous; and towards universities in locales where they would not have to disguise their sexuality, and where their positioning as other would be less conspicuous. Participants strategically placed their decisions, upon seeking to maximize their opportunities as gay students to freely engage with their sexuality.

Some of the influences on participants' university choices, such as class positioning, subject availability, wanting to move away from home communities, being somewhat anonymous within their environment (not wanting to attend the same institution as other people they knew), and the size of the city, were unrelated to their gayness and hence may be concerns for all students regardless of sexuality. However, a decidedly gay edge could also be identified in Taulke-Johnson's (2010) participant accounts. For example, they wanted to move away from their home communities because they experienced them as heterosexist and homophobic, thus stuffy and claustrophobic; they did not want to attend the same university as certain others

because of their gay-intolerant attitude; they wanted to escape from village and small-town surveillance because it constrained and restricted their expression and living out their gayness, due to the continuously being 'on stage'; and they wanted to attend a university in the city because of the social networking opportunities and the anonymity that they high concentration of visibly gay people there would provide.

Carter (2015) conducted research to explore the phenomenological essence of gay men who chose to come out in college. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with self-identified gay men, ranging in age from 18-23 years old, who reported that they had come out while in college. Using a phenomenological approach, Carter sought to explore the following research question, "What are the lived experiences of gay men who came out while in college?" (p. 9). The results of this study indicated that participants did not factor in their impending coming out into their choice of college. The factors that inhibited the participants from coming out in their choice of college were reported as:

 1) Lack of LGBT social support on campus;

 2) Faith based-concerns due to an individual's or family's belief system, or institutional religious affiliation;

3) An individual's concern regarding familial responsibilities;

4) An individuals' security in perceived heterosexual identity.

Both supportive and inhibiting factors were found that influenced the participant's coming out while in college. Identified supportive factors included: 1) a welcoming campus environment; 2) public examples of gay relationships; 3) possessing a masculine disposition; 4) increased use of technology; 5) desire to help others come out, and 6) a believed change in public perceptions about coming out. Identified inhibiting factors included: 1) LGB as a hidden

population; 2) Being involved in non-public relationships, and 3) Security in possessing a perceived homosexual identity. Lastly, the results of Carter's study indicated that gay men who came out in college chose not to be involved in LGB student organizations in favor of integrated social advocacy organizations.

Strayhorn et al. (2008) studied the factors affecting the college choice of African American, gay, male undergraduates. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the college decision-making process and retention of African American gay men. Data from seven participants revealed insights into factors considered when choosing a college and conditions perceived as critical to their success in higher education. Strayhorn et al. (2008) claimed that no recent studies were uncovered that explored the collegiate experiences of "invisible" or marginalized minoritized men such as African American gay male undergraduates.

Interviews were conducted with seven African American gay men to understand: a) how they negotiated their college destination decisions; and, b) factors they perceive as critical to their success in college. Two research questions guided the study: a) What factors did African American males consider when choosing to attend a predominately White institution? and, b) What factors do African American gay males identify as critical to their success in college, as defined by retention? (Strayhorn et al., 2008).

Findings from this study included that participants overwhelmingly noted that they came to college to "come out," and therefore chose a college environment that would allow them to "come out" and "live out" (Strayhorn et al., 2008). Also, participants, on average, acknowledged that they considered the location of the school when choosing a college. Often these decisions were made with references to family or parents, such as, participants noted wanting to be away from parents and family so that they could meet other gay people and avoid preconceived

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notions negative perceptions, and biases of family members. Participants identified two factors that seemed critical to their success in college: supportive relationships with peers and family, self-determination, and independence. Participants consistently identified supportive peer relationships that they believed influenced their success in college. Participants also referred to White gay peers and reported having few Black, gay friends. When they did report Black friends, most were Black heterosexual women. Finally, participants perceived themselves as self-determined, motivated, and independent, which in the participants' views, affected their ability to succeed in college. For instance, when asked about other individuals upon whom they rely for support in college, several participants stressed the role that they played on their own success, stating "I am a pretty self-supporting person" or "I like to figure things out for myself" (Strayhorn et al., 2008, p. 99).

Strayhorn et al. (2008) noted two significant findings for discussion: First, that African American gay male participants in the study stressed that they went to college to "come out" and therefore chose a college that provided space to come out and live freely. Strayhorn et al. noted that this was a significant finding and had implications for college choice theory (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) and those who assist students in making college decisions (e.g., parents, teachers, counselors, and student affairs professionals). However, existing theories do not consider "coming out" in explanations of students' college destination. Strayhorn et al. (2008) noted that future research should build upon previous studies to rework prevailing three- stage models that fail to address this variable. A second finding, Strayhorn et al. (2008) noted was that African American gay men identified supportive peer relationships as critical to their success in college. Specifically, they identified interracial gay peers who helped them navigate the academic and social currents of their lives. These findings are consistent with previous research

on the importance of supportive relationships to the success of African American male collegians. However, these findings contradict perspectives that assume "one-size-fits-all" for African American students. In other words, while some research suggests African American students are most comfortable among their peers and in social enclaves (Feagin et al., 1996; Tatum, 1997) and other cultural spaces (Patton, 2006). Strayhorn et al. (2008) found findings to an important caveat—that this is not necessarily true of all African American collegians. Issues of homophobia, gender expression, and even spiritually may reduce, if not eliminate, the ability of Black gay males to feel comfortable among their peers at predominately White institutions.

Strayhorn (2014) studied the lived experiences of Korean American men in college. Using a phenomenological approach, four South Korean male undergraduates, who identified as "gay" participated in the study. Data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Findings included two interpretable themes: that they, "went to college to 'live out'" and "'encountered gay racism/racialized homophobia" (Strayhorn, 2014, p. 589). From these themes, two major findings were identified, suggesting a number of important conclusions related to the studies objectives. First, Asian gay men in the study shared that one of their initial inspirations for enrolling in college was to come out as a gay male. United States- born South Korean gay men talked about going to college to flee anti-gay oppression within their family, whereas foreign-born participants talked about migrating to the United States for college as a way of rejecting narrow anti-gay mentalities in Korea. Strayhorn (2014) noted that his study "provided initial evidence that might break new ground on student's college decision-making-process—what scholars have termed, college choice" (p. 592). Prevailing models of college choice identify several common factors that students consider when choosing a college destination; factors range from academic reputation of the institution and availability of major or

financial support (Hossler et al., 1999), without a single reference to LGBT factors. Results from Strayhorn's (2014) analysis and other recent studies (Cress & Ikeda, 2003; Strayhorn, 2012, 2014; Strayhorn et al., 2008) may suggest the importance of including information in future models about the campus friendliness towards gay students, finding a sense of belonging, and support services to GLBT students. Second, although participants expected to come out when they enrolled in college, they did not anticipate experiencing anti-Asian racism in the gay community (which is largely White, and male) or homophobia in the Asian American/Korean American communities on campus. Strayhorn (2014) noted that derogatory remarks or racial micro-aggressions were the most common form of gay racism, ranging from benign teasing to more vicious degradations.

Literature Review Summary

This chapter explored the literature related to the theory and understanding of the college choice process and development of theory and models over time. This chapter then focused on a review of issues and concerns regarding access and equity in the college choice process and the problems with comprehensive college choice models. Later, the chapter focused on new directions in the research of college choice, moving away from the assumption that all students have equitable access to information and resources necessary for engaging in a college choice process and exploration models for diverse groups of students. The chapter concluded with a review of prior research on gay men and college choice.

These areas were examined in order to provide context to better understand the "lived experiences" of openly gay, cisgender, male undergraduate students and how they might experience the college choice process and the factors and issues they may consider as part of that

process. What is known about the college choice process for first year, openly gay,

undergraduate, cisgender males are limited and is evidenced by the need for this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand how first-year cisgender openly gay male undergraduate students experienced the college choice process. Such an approach requires researchers to go beyond the surface description of phenomenon to explore the way in which meanings arise through participant-researcher interactions (Smith, 2005). Access to these meanings is made possible if researchers adopt a hermeneutic and questioning approach. In relation to this approach, researchers are encouraged to stand alongside participants and ask critical questions. According to Landridge (2007), adopting an insider's perspective also requires researchers to seek to understand participants' experiences and the meanings they attribute to them within a specific sociocultural context, which Smith (2005) argues involves the creation of a strong semi-structured interview protocol.

Qualitative methods are well-suited for a study using a constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2012) noted that qualitative inquiry is appropriate when "the literature might yield a little information about the phenomenon of study, and you need to learn more from participants in their exploration" (p. 16).

Research Questions

The three questions that guided this study were:

1. How did gay cisgender male undergraduate student participants experience the college choice process?

2. What factors/variables did gay cisgender male participants consider in the college choice process?

3. What information/resources did gay cisgender male participants use or access in their college choice process?

Using the lens of social constructivist theory, the focus was on the "lived experience" of first-year cisgender openly gay male undergraduate students and the "constructed reality" of those experiences. Smith et al. (2013) noted that "the complex understanding of 'experience' invokes a lived process, an unfurling of perspectives and meanings, which are unique to the person's embodied and situated relationship in the world" (p. 21). According to Merriam (2002), the key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals and the interaction with their world. The characteristics of qualitative research include a focus on understanding the meaning of a process by using the researcher as the primary instrument, an inductive approach to research, and inquiry that is richly descriptive (Merriam, 2002).

The constructivist paradigm asserts that individuals make meaning of their own relative experiences, and that meaning is dependent upon the context within which their experiences take place (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2013). Constructivism proposes that there is no singular reality that defines human experience but rather that there are multiple realities. Knowledge is therefore co-constructed between participant and researcher (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln et al., 1985; Lincoln et al., 2011). A constructivist paradigm is appropriate for a study in which participants are asked to make meaning of their experiences through a structured interaction with the researcher.

Using an inductive approach to analyze the responses to the qualitative questions assisted in creating a framework from the student responses, rather than imposing prior categories upon them (Robinson & Glanser, 2016). The goal was to understand the way students made sense of their college experiences in relation to the expectations of that experience. A phenomenological

methodology was used (Patton, 2002) to capture the subjective nature of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Participants

This study included first-year, cisgender male undergraduate participants who identified as gay men at the time of their admission process and attended one of three large, public, urban, research-based, state universities located in the Northwestern area of the United States. The participants came to the university as first-time college students directly from high school. Participants did not include those who took a gap year before attending, students who stopped-out at another university previously, or those who engaged in military service before attending college. These research sites will be referred to throughout this study as "X University, Y University, and Z University." Three research sites are being utilized to ensure that enough participants can be accessed to ensure active and willing participants that meet the criteria to take part in the study.

Smith et al. (2013) noted, "because Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is an ideographic approach, concerned with understanding particular phenomenon in particular contexts, IPA studies are conducted on small sample sizes" (p. 49). Purposeful sampling strategies were used to identify potential participants. Patton (1990) characterized purposeful sampling as the selection of rich cases, which are "those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (p. 169). The specific purposeful sampling strategies that were used to identify participants were homogenous sampling, convenience sampling, and snowball sampling. Creswell (2012) noted that in homogenous sampling "the researcher purposefully samples individuals or sites based on membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics" (p. 208). Each participant was

selected based on his identification as a first-year, openly gay cisgender male, in their first-year, as an undergraduate male student, and of traditional age 18-24. The goal for active and willing participants was set at 10 to15.

Data Collection

In order to recruit participants, a referral letter was sent via email, and then a follow up letter by regular mail (Appendix A) to the coordinators of the LGBT Education and Support Services program on campus, as well as staff members in the Dean of Student's Office at X, Y, and Z Universities who support LGBT students as part of their professional responsibilities. The contact information for these gatekeepers was freely available on the university's website. The letter to each gatekeeper included information about the study and the time commitment involved. Gatekeepers were asked to forward the referral letter to potential participants, who were then asked to contact the researcher for more information about the study. If I had recruited more than 15 viable participants, a random lottery would have been administered to select the research subjects.

Participants were recruited and interviewed during the spring, summer, and fall terms as their recollections may have been more clear and vivid as the experience was still new and fresh in their minds. Once the selected participants were identified, each of them was sent a recruitment letter via email (Appendix B). The recruitment letter described the purpose of the study, provided an overview of what types of questions were to be asked in the interview, requested that participants forward the recruitment letter to other potential participants they may know, and provided an informed consent form (Appendix C) with all of the information regarding the study and the participants' rights and confidentiality information. Participants were asked to return their completed consent forms via email and were notified that they could

withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were compensated with a twenty-five-dollar gift card from a national on-line retailer for their participation, which was sent to each of them via email at the end of their interviews.

Following the receipt of participants' informed consent forms, the first data were collected via an intake survey (Appendix D), which included questions about participant demographics (e.g., gender identity, sexual orientation, age, confirmation of freshman, first-year class standing, and major). The intake survey also asked them to specify when they came out as a gay man. If the participant came out prior to their college search process, then they could be included in the study. If they came out during or after their college selection process, then they would not be selected or included in the study. The intake survey also provided an opportunity for each participant to select a pseudonym or have one selected for them. This pseudonym was used throughout the study for confidentiality and to protect their identity. Participants were then contacted to schedule a single 60–90-minute semi-structured interview using a 13-question interview protocol (Appendix E). Interviews were conducted via the internet at a location that was convenient and comfortable for each participant. A single, 60-90-minute, semi-structured interview with each participant was conducted. The interviews were recorded using a digital recording device. In addition to the digital recording. All recorded data was encrypted and stored on a stand-alone drive so that it was not accessible to anyone but the researcher.

Semi-structured interviews were used to allow the opportunity to ask follow-up questions and to enable participants to speak freely. Barriball and While (1994) noted that semi-structured interviews are "well-suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues and enable probing for more information and clarification of answers" (p. 330). Smith et al. (2013) pointed out that semi-structured interviews

allow for the collection of the "rich data" required for an IPA study (p. 56), while reinforcing the

importance of participants being able to "tell their own stories, in their own words" (p. 57). A

semi-structured interview protocol allowed participants to authentically discuss their experiences

in their college choice process as a gay cisgender man and freely discuss any experiences or

influences that they felt were important. Data that could potentially identify a participant or the

research site were omitted from the final manuscript.

Data Analysis

Once interviews were completed, the audio recordings were transcribed and checked for

errors. An email was sent to participants with an invitation for them to review the transcript from

the interview. If a participant disagreed with the transcription, it could be changed. Participants

were given seven days to respond to this invitation for review and response.

The interpretive phenomenological analysis procedure described by Smith et al. (2013)

was applied to the semi-structured interview data to identify emergent themes, which described

the essence of participants' lived experience. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed

verbatim and emailed to participants with a request that they verify their transcript's accuracy or

recommend corrections. Member-verified transcripts were imported as source documents into

NVivo 12 computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. Data was then analyzed using the

IPA data analysis framework described by Smith et al. (2013). While the steps and IPA are

intended to be flexible, inductive, and iterative (Smith et al., 2013), the process of analysis

included six specific steps that were followed in order to analyze the data in the study:

The first step of IPA data analysis involved reading and rereading the first participant's

transcript in full to gain familiarity with it (Smith et al., 2013). The transcript read during this

step was Adam's. In Step 2 of the analysis, data reduction was conducted by discarding

statements from the transcript that were unnecessary for describing the participant's lived

experience. The text excluded from further analysis during this step consisted of redundant

statements. For example, Adam stated that his primary consideration in choosing a college was

its urban location, where he believed that gay men would be more supported and accepted than

they were in his rural hometown. Some of the statements Adam made to this effect included:

- "I definitely wanted more of a city environment versus a suburban or rural

  environment."

- "I was just fine, as long as it [the college] was in a city."

- "[I wanted to go] where there was a school in a city."

- "[I wanted to attend] a place [college] in a city."

Only the first of these four statements were retained for further analysis. The other three

were preserved in the original source document. The first sample statement was selected for

further analysis because it indicated the college setting Adam preferred as well as the settings he

wanted to avoid, while the other three statements did not include the reinforcing information

about his wanting to avoid rural or suburban college locations.

In the third step of the analysis, within-case themes were identified in the first transcript

(Smith et al., 2013). This step consisted of clustering statements that converged on broader,

overarching themes. For example, Adam's statement, "I definitely wanted more of a city

environment versus a suburban or rural environment," was clustered with five other, non-

redundant transcript excerpts such as:

In a small town, I felt limited on who I could be and what I could do. Yeah, I was "out,"

but I still had to be careful. I wanted a school where I thought people would be more

open-minded, I could explore more of who I was, hopefully meet other people more like me and build friendships and relationships.

The cluster of related statements converged on the theme that one of the most important factors Adam considered in choosing his college was the college's location, with his strong preference being for a college location that would have a more cosmopolitan and accepting culture than his small hometown did. These statements were grouped into one NVivo node, which represented the within-case theme. The within-case theme received the preliminary label, wanting to get away from home.

The fourth step of the analysis involved finding connections between the within-case themes. The theme about considering the factor of college location as a means of getting away from the home environment was related to a different within-case theme about how Adam's family, and particularly his mother, conveyed the expectation that Adam would attend and graduate from college. The expectation that Adam would go to college was expressed with consistently enough that he perceived his family as taking for granted that he would continue his education after high school. Adam reported that he internalized this expectation and never seriously considered not going to college. Adam described one manifestation of this family expectation in stating, "All my full siblings had gone to college, either community college or university, and I believe that even my half-siblings went to college. So, I knew it wasn't really an option for me not to go to college." The factor of family expectations was related to the factor of college location because both influenced Adam's college choice, and because both were associated with his family and community background.

In Step 5 of the analysis, the preceding steps were conducted for the 11 remaining transcripts (Smith et al., 2013). Step 6 involved a cross-case analysis, in which within-case

themes were compared across participants to identify common themes that indicated the essence of the lived experience of the college choice process for members of the sample (Smith et al., 2013). Table 1 indicates which participants contributed to each of the cross-case and within-case themes.

Several cross-case with embedded within-case themes emerged from the IPA analysis. Participant contribution to theme are broken down in Table 1 and reflect a number of concerns for many college applicants. These expected themes include: spending more time researching the school leads to a positive experience, academic and career factors like program fit and class size, campus life factors like extracurricular activities on campus (which were considered by all participants except two who reported regretting not researching extracurriculars), family or community considerations, and campus tours. What stands out sharply are the considerations spent on LGBTQ acceptance, where the student considers evidence that their campus is LGBTQ friendly and welcoming. This theme provides the perspective that is missing: LGBTQ future college students look for evidence that their chosen college supports their identity. This finding has significance as colleges seek to become more accessible in an equitable way to traditionally underserved populations of students and pave the way to make college less intimidating and more appealing to LGBTQ students.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the standard by which the quality, replicability, and rigor of qualitative research is determined. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria through which researchers can assess trustworthiness in a qualitative study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (p. 301).

Credibility refers to the extent to which the design of the study engenders results that accurately describe the phenomenon, particularly from the perspectives of the participants (Brown, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt et al., 2007; Shenton 2004). Credibility was established through peer debriefing with selected colleagues in student affairs in order to discuss my initial reactions and to solicit their feedback following each interview. No personally identifiable information about participants or research sites were shared during the peer debriefing process. I also conducted member checks with participants by checking in with them throughout the interview about their interpretations of the questions, reflecting back what I heard them say, asking follow-up questions, and asking them to review their interview transcripts for any errors, additions, or omissions.

Transferability refers to the extent to which the researcher provides sufficient information to enable others to evaluate whether the research is applicable in other contexts (Brown, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt et al., 2007; Shenton, 2004). Transferability was established through description of the research site and participants as well as through numerous quotes to support the conclusions that were described in the results section.

Dependability refers to the extent to which consistency and stability in the research process and methods have been demonstrated. Dependability was established by a thorough description of the methods used for this study and research process including the use of raw data intake forms, and process notes.

Authenticity in a qualitative study can also be evaluated by examining five criteria: fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity. Fairness involves presenting a complete and balanced view that is informed through negotiation with participants, while authenticity in the remaining four criteria is the focus.

Ontological authenticity criteria focus on the ontological purpose of the study in how meaning is created between the participants and the researcher and open with the results. Educative authenticity involves the expansion of the researchers' and participants' understanding of the phenomenon. Catalytic authenticity refers to how change is created as a result of the study. Tactical authenticity occurs when participants to take action as a result of participation in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Schwandt et al., 2007).

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the data represents the experiences of the participants rather than those of the researcher (Brown, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt et al., 2007; Shenton 2004). Confirmability was also established by the audit trail the researcher kept in tracking the entire research process. The audit trail included raw data, field notes, reflexive notes, intake forms, and process notes stored as hard copies. The reflexive notes and other documentation were used to track my thought processes and progress and provided a means of exploring researcher perceptions in relation to participant responses for overlapping or divergent themes to ensure the participants' experiences are represented accurately in the writeup of the results.

This phenomenological study employed a constructivist qualitative approach to understand the lived experiences of openly gay cisgender male undergraduates and their experience of the college choice process. This approach was selected due to its epistemological underpinnings about the nature of knowledge being socially constructed. Constructivism also resonated with the study's primary objective which was to understand students' lived experiences through their own stories, perceptions, and experiences.

The goal of phenomenological research is to identify and examine phenomena through the lived perspectives of those who personally experience the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998).

Researchers who use this approach "search for the essential, invariant structure (or essence) of the central underlying meaning of the experiences" (Creswell, 1998 p. 52). Phenomenological research enables the researcher to describe, interpret, and report data that informs how educators approach their work with different student populations.

Summary

Chapter three provided an overview of the research study in understanding how cisgender male, first year undergraduate students, who identify as openly gay, experienced the college choice process. In order to explore these meanings, it was important to go beyond the surface description and to explore the way in which meanings arise through participant-researcher interactions. It is important that the researcher seeks to understand the participant's experiences and the meanings they attribute to them within a specific socio-cultural context. This information was gained through qualitative methods, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, and a constructivist paradigm. This chapter also presented information on the methodology of the proposed study, including a description of the participants, data collection and analysis, risks and benefits of participating in the study, and strategies to help ensure quality throughout this study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter is a presentation of the findings in this study. The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study was to understand how cisgender male undergraduate students who openly identify as gay experienced the college choice process. Using semi-structured interviews, data was collected from 12 participants who identified as gay male undergraduate students at one of three universities (X University, Y University, or Z University, in the Northwestern area of the United States.

The following section of this chapter is a description of the 12 study participants, using the pseudonyms they chose. Next, this chapter includes a description of the findings from the transcribed, semi-structured interview data. This chapter then continues with a presentation of the study findings, which are organized by research question. A summary of the findings concludes this chapter.

Participants

Each of the 12 participants selected a pseudonym to be used in place of his real name in this presentation of findings. The pseudonyms participants selected were as follows:

- Adam, a Freshman, majoring in Health and Human Sciences, at X University;

- Alex, a Freshman, majoring in Pre-Business, at Y University;

- Brent, a Freshman, majoring in Pre-Business, at X University;

- Cole, a Sophomore, majoring in Communications, at Z University;

- David, a Sophomore, majoring in Pre-Business, at X University;

- Greg, a Sophomore, majoring in History and Education, at X University;

- John, a Sophomore, majoring in Criminal Justice, at Y University;

- Liam, a Freshman, majoring in Philosophy and Economics, at Z University;

- Marco, a Sophomore, majoring in Psychology, at Z University;

- Sam, a Freshman, majoring in Journalism, at Z University;

- Steve, a Sophomore, majoring in Public Policy and Pre-Law, at Z University, and;

- Zander, a Sophomore, majoring in Geography, at X University.

Table 1.

Participants Contributing to Cross-case and Within-case Themes

Cross-case theme / Within-case theme grouped into cross-case theme	✓ = Participant contributed supporting data											
	Adam	Alex	Brent	Cole	David	Greg	John	Liam	Marco	Sam	Steve	Zander
Students who took more care in researching colleges reported more positive experiences	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Afraid								✓	✓			
Certainty and confidence			✓	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓
Confusion		✓										
Independence		✓			✓		✓		✓			
Indifference	✓											
Mixed feelings					✓							
Uncertainty	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓		
Academic and career factors were considered	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Admissions standards	✓	✓							✓		✓	
Class size					✓				✓			
Discrepant data - Academics were not an important factor	✓								✓			
Fit between programs and interests		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Program as pathway to employment	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Campus life and culture factors were considered	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Discrepant data - Culture and extracurriculars not a major consideration				✓	✓				✓			
Extracurriculars considered				✓		✓		✓		✓		
Feeling of community					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
LGBTQ acceptance	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Regret not considering extracurriculars	✓	✓										

Cross-case theme Within-case theme grouped into cross-case theme	✓ = Participant contributed supporting data											
	Adam	Alex	Brent	Cole	David	Greg	John	Liam	Marco	Sam	Steve	Zander
Family and community background factors were considered	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Close to home					✓	✓						
Cost was a consideration	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Expectation of college attendance	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓
Family provided positive examples	✓	✓			✓	✓				✓		✓
Getting away from home	✓	✓		✓				✓			✓	✓
Need for financial assistance	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓		
Information from colleges was accessed and used	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Campus visits	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓
College fairs					✓							✓
Mailings		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓		✓
Online resources	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Talking to students and staff				✓		✓	✓					
Resources in home and high school were accessed and used	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Counselor not important	✓	✓			✓						✓	
Guidance from family	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Helpful counselor				✓		✓	✓			✓		✓
Motivation from family	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	
Word of mouth	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

Analysis revealed six major themes: 1: "Students Who Took More Care in Researching Colleges Reported More Positive Experiences," 2: "Academic and Career Factors Were Considered," 3: "Campus Life and Culture Factors Were Considered," 4: "Family and Community Background Factors Were Considered," 5: "Information from Colleges Was

Accessed and Used," 6: "Resources in the Home and High School Were Accessed and Used.".

They are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2.

Major Themes

Research Question	Major Theme
RQ1: How did gay, cisgender male undergraduate student participants experience the college choice process?	Theme 1: Students Who Took More Care in Researching Colleges Reported More Positive Experiences
RQ2: What factors/variables did gay, cisgender male undergraduate student participants consider in the college choice process?	Theme 2: Academic and Career Factors Were Considered
	Theme 3: Campus Life and Culture Factors Were Considered
	Theme 4: Family and Community Background Factors Were Considered
RQ3: What information/resources did gay, cisgender male, undergraduate student participants use or access in their college choice process?	Theme 5: Information from Colleges Was Accessed and Used
	Theme 6: Resources in the Home and High School Were Accessed and Used

Findings

This presentation of the findings is organized by research question. The findings are presented as cross-case themes describing essences of participants' lived experience. Direct

quotes from the data are provided as evidence of the themes and to strengthen the confirmability of the analysis.

Research Question 1

RQ1 was: How did gay, cisgender male undergraduate student participants experience the college choice process? One cross-case theme identified during data analysis was used to address this question. The theme was: students who took more care in researching colleges reported more positive experiences.

Theme 1: Students Who Took More Care in Researching Colleges Reported More Positive Experiences

All the participants contributed data to this theme. The participants reported that they experienced a variety of feelings during the college choice process. The sample in this study was evenly divided between participants who reported that they experienced a strong sense of confidence and certainty during the college choice process, and participants who reported that they experienced strong feelings of confusion, anxiety, and uncertainty. The common quality of the college choice experience across participants was that the feelings associated with it were strong ones. No participants reported that they experienced the college choice process as unremarkable. Adam reported "Not at all. Yeah, zero. Not that like um yeah. It wasn't until I got to X University, and I looked into anything like that. Or, started doing any research into it." He also reported dissatisfaction with his experience, remarking:

> Looking back, I wish I would have gone to a different school. I'm like, I'm happy with where I'm at. But I wish I would have known then, what I know right now about colleges, programs, and career opportunities. I probably would have gone to a different school and pursued a different career path.

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The feeling that more research should have been done before applying appeared among other participants as well. Alex, another participant advised:

Don't do what I did, take the process seriously and ask questions, get feedback and ask for help. Read through the information and have an idea, or ideas of what you think you want to study. Do your homework about admissions criteria, scholarship opportunities, as well as clubs and organizations on campus you may want to be involved with. Visit the campuses and make an informed decision.

Other participants reported a great deal of care and effort being taken to research their selected schools. Brent reported that his parents had taken a vested interest in his application process and throughout high school as he built a solid resume of activities with a good GPA. His research paid off, but his family took him on many trips to visit preferred colleges he had been researching since early on in high school. Cole reported that he did research into the visibility of LGBT students, which he described as something "[he] knew [he] wanted" and was more important than the available programs. His city had a strong LGBT community with an LGBT college fair at an LGBT center located nearby. This made a significant difference in his decision to attend.

The factor that most clearly distinguished participants who experienced strong feelings of certainty and confidence from those who experienced anxiety and uncertainty was the significantly greater amount of effort that the confident participants put into researching colleges. Brent associated his certainty and confidence with having decided in advance of applying to any colleges which factors were important to him and then carefully matching potential colleges to his criteria:

I felt very certain about my decision. I had the information about the schools I applied to, and they met the criteria that I was looking for, as far as the degree and program that I wanted, scholarship opportunities, athletics, and clubs and organizations. I knew I could be successful and happy at any of the schools.

Notable in Brent's response was his report that he did not look for a single factor in the colleges to which he applied. His experience of confidence and certainty was associated with assessing potential colleges in several independent domains, including academics, availability of financial assistance, and extracurriculars. His knowledge that each of the colleges he applied to was a good fit for him in each of those domains enabled him to feel certain that he would be "successful and happy" at any of his colleges of choice. The pattern of strong feelings of confidence and certainty being associated with a rigorous comparison of personal needs and preferences with college characteristics was consistent across the six participants who reported positive experiences. Zander provided another example of this pattern in stating:

I felt good about my decision. The school had the program I was interested in. I met the admission requirements for classes and GPA. The school had opportunities with Social Justice and Community Service. There was an LGBT presence on campus, and I could see that through the website and organizations on campus. It was affordable, and it was far enough away from home where I would feel independent, but close enough if I needed to head home for some reason it would not take me hours and hours to get there.

Zander was an example of a participant who considered potential colleges' supportiveness toward LGBT students. Other factors Zander considered included college location, admission requirements, cost, and extracurriculars. By ensuring that the colleges he

applied to were good fits for him across these domains, Zander enabled himself to feel confident that his college experiences would be positive.

The participants who reported negative experiences of the college choice process indicated that they expended little effort in learning about the colleges to which they applied and connected their experiences to anxiety or stress. Steve associated his high anxiety during the college choice process with his lack of a plan:

> I was really stressed out because all my other friends were high achievers and had pre-med ambitions and engineering and computer science interests. And I didn't really have any big ambitions at the time, or a plan. I just felt really stressed out and anxious.

Steve stated that the factors he considered when applying to colleges were, "the admission process, and how prestigious I thought the school was," but was not conducting much research on his selected schools outside of noting their perceived prestige. Steve assessed the prestige of colleges according to the competitiveness of their admissions process. He said that this form of prestige was important to him because he expected it to reflect favorably on his own high school work ethic, which earned him a 4.0 GPA: "Being good at school was like a core personality trait of mine . . . so I wanted to go to a prestigious school just to show off my hard work. That was really important to me."

Steve applied to five colleges that he considered prestigious, but without seeking more specific information about academics, extracurriculars, or cost. Two of the colleges accepted him. Steve said, "They were both what I considered prestigious schools, but it came down to money." He added of the cost of the colleges to which he applied, "Money, the whole time, [I] kind of wasn't really thinking about the cost. My parents were, but I wasn't." However, of the two universities that accepted Steve, he and his family could afford the cost of one, but not of the

other: "When it came down to it, when I was choosing between those two schools, it was money. The cost to attend [Z University] was affordable." Thus, Steve's college choice experience was characterized by a high level of stress and budget restrictions only considered after acceptance into his schools. Steve associated his high anxiety with not having a plan for his course of study or later career, with applying to schools about which he knew little except that they were difficult to be admitted to, and with having his final choice of college forced by considerations of cost, a factor he had not previously contemplated.

Alex described a college choice experience similar to Steve's. According to Alex, the factors he considered were, "Where can I get accepted, and scholarships to afford to go." Alex described his college choice experience as characterized by feelings of uncertainty, and by a lack of agency that he coped with through passive acceptance:

I guess I felt independent, but I was so confused by all of the information and the processes. I was making grown-up decisions . . . If I am being honest, it was 'fake it till you make it.' I didn't really know what I was doing, but it all seemed to fall into place.

Alex stated that his advice to younger students undergoing the college choice process would be to regard his haphazard process as an example of what not to do: "Don't do what I did. Take the process seriously and ask questions. Get feedback and ask for help . . . make an informed decision." Thus, like Steve, Alex associated his college choice process with uncertainty ("confused") and a sense of lost agency ("just go with the flow, thinking that everything is going to fall into place"). Also, like Steve and the other four participants who reported strong feelings of uncertainty surrounding the college choice process, Alex associated his confusion with not conducting the necessary research to assess whether the colleges he applied to were likely to be a good fit for him.

Research Question 2

RQ2 was: What factors/variables did gay, cisgender male undergraduate student participants consider in the college choice process? Three of the cross-case themes identified during data analysis were relevant to addressing this question. The three themes were: (Theme 2) academic and career factors were considered, (Theme 3) campus life and culture factors were considered, and (Theme 4) family and community background factors were considered.

Theme 2: Academic and Career Factors Were Considered

Almost all participants contributed to this theme. The remaining participant provided discrepant data indicating that he did not consider academic and career factors during his college choice process. Of the participants who considered those factors, all reported that a primary consideration was whether their intended program of study would be a pathway to employment. However, the participants who contributed to this theme varied greatly in the degree of importance they assigned to academic and career factors during their college choice process. As the previous discussion under Theme 1 indicated, half of participants did not regard these factors as sufficiently important to conduct research into the available programs of study, beyond confirming that the colleges they applied to granted degrees in the fields they intended to study.

The participants who described their college choice process as involving uncertainty, anxiety, and confusion gave minimal attention to academic and career factors, when they considered those factors at all. Adam associated his college choice experience with uncertainty and described his process as one of, "go[ing] with the flow." A factor Adam took into some consideration when planning to apply to colleges was whether they had, "a good program," in the field he believed he wanted to study. Adam contributed to the present theme by reporting that a factor he considered was the quality of the academics in his intended program of interest.

However, Adam also reported that he did not conduct significant research into his intended program, with the result that one year after he entered it, he expressed that, "[he] wish[ed] [he] would have known then [before college] what I know right now about colleges, programs, and career opportunities. I probably would have gone to a different school and pursued a different career path." Adam considered academics and career factors enough to confirm that the program in which he was interested existed in the colleges to which he applied, but not enough to assess whether that program matched his expectations or would sustain his interest.

Liam also felt anxiety while choosing a college ("I felt really scared"), and he described experiences similar to Adam's, stating that he knew what he wanted to study, and that lack of the relevant program disqualified at least one college from his consideration: "[XXXXXXXX] looked cool but didn't have my major or program." Liam reported that he took a pragmatic approach to selecting his program of study, saying that he considered, "potential wage and earnings after graduation." Like Adam, however, Liam did not conduct research into students' academic experiences in his intended program of study, except to learn the average class size.

Participants who experienced certainty and confidence during their college choice process took academic and career factors into consideration more rigorously than their less-confident counterparts. Brent, whose experience of confidence was reported under Theme 1, stated that he regarded academic and career factors as the most important considerations in his college choice process, and that he assessed programs according to very specific criteria. He states: "Most important was a good solid Business Program, with a focus in sports marketing, and opportunities to get experience while going to school. You know, cooperative education and internship opportunities. Getting real-world experience outside of the classroom."

Greg, who also associated his college choice process with feelings of confidence ("I felt good about my choices, I had a lot of information on the schools"), regarded the college choice process as important primarily because of academic and career considerations: "When it came right down to it, choosing a college was a major decision. It was where I was setting myself up for success in my future career, choosing the right degree or program." Greg stated that most colleges had the education and history programs in which he was interested, so he visited campuses to sit in on classes and workshops and to speak to students about their academic experiences.

John experienced confidence and certainty during his college choice process ("I was confident, very confident"), and he stated that academic factors were one of the two most important considerations to him: "I mainly looked at the academic half and the living-on-campus half. And then I started to look at student organizations on campus and information on campus life. But mainly I thought about the academics and the living-on-campus piece."

Marco provided discrepant data, stating that he did not consider academic or career factors. Marco associated his college choice process with anxiety ("I felt overwhelmed and lost and discouraged a lot of the time"), and he indicated that he did not consider academic or career factors at all because he understood that the college to which he was applying would not require him to select a program of study until after he earned his general education credits: "I don't think the programs themselves were ever an issue . . . you initially start off learning all the disciplines, and as you go further along, you sort of drill down into what you actually want to do." Based on this general understanding, Marco did not research any program of study at the college he chose.

Theme 3: Campus Life and Culture Factors Were Considered

Most participants contributed to this theme, and two participants provided discrepant data. The feature of campus life and culture that the majority of participants (*n*=8) considered was LGBT acceptance and access to an LGBT community that was supported rather than marginalized in the college community. Adam expressed his consideration of this factor in stating, "It was definitely important for there to be an LGBT presence, or more LGBT people, more people like me." David stated that LGBT acceptance in campus culture was not the most important factor to him, but that it was a necessary one:

> I wasn't focusing on my sexuality as part of my identity, it wasn't a huge factor, but I was aware that X University prioritized services for LGBT students . . . My thought process was, I will go where I'm accepted [as an openly gay man].

Greg also described acceptance of and support for LGBT students as a necessary condition of his college choice: "The school had to support me as a student, identifying as LGBT. And not just me, but [being] welcoming to LGBT and other student populations."

These participants indicated that a campus culture accepting of LGBT students was important to them because they did not want to attend a school where they would feel pressured to hide their sexual orientation. They wanted to be able to self-actualize authentically, as Greg indicated: "I wanted to go to a school that was accepting of LGBT students, where I could be comfortable to be myself on campus." Cole also prioritized the acceptance of his authentic self as a necessary condition of selecting a college, stating that he researched, "LGBT people and programs, resources and support," because, "I wanted to be around people like me and be supported for who I am." The participants need to be accepted and visible arose from these transcripts.

The campus-culture factor referenced by the second-highest number of participants (*n*=6) was that the college should feel like a cohesive, supportive community. This factor was related to LGBT acceptance, in the sense that participants wanted to feel that their authentic selves were welcomed in the campus community. However, this factor extended beyond LGBT acceptance to participants' desire that the campus community should be accepting of students of all identities, and that attending their college of choice would give them and all other students the sense of being a part of a community.

John did not consider community during his college choice process, but he stated that in hindsight, he believed prospective students should, as their highest priority, "Make sure you find a school that you can call home. Think about: Is this where I want to be for the next four years of my life?" John stated that the most important determinant of whether a college could feel "like home" was, "Community, making sure there's a good community."

Liam also described a campus culture that involved a sense of community as the most important factor to him, both prospectively and in hindsight:

> The best thing is to have a good community, and feel it is a good community, that is there to support you . . . For me it was, "What is the atmosphere like?" But know if you have a good community, they will steer you in the right direction. You will have lifelong friends.

In regard to campus life and culture, a third of participants reported that the availability of extracurricular activities and clubs was a factor they considered when choosing a college. Brent stated, "I wanted to find a university where I could participate in activities but do some kind of community service as well. I wanted a school with good athletics and sports collegiate and intramural teams." Brent explained his interest in athletic extracurriculars as a college choice factor stating, "It was important for them to have good athletics . . . it is great to have good

collegiate athletics and enjoy your school winning in football, or basketball, or other sports."

Greg considered athletic extracurriculars as well as, "LGBT clubs [and] organizations." Ensuring

there are adequate clubs and groups that are accepting enough of LGBT people was expressed by

participants as a serious consideration when selecting schools.

John and Marco provided discrepant data indicating that they did not consider campus

life and culture factors during their college choice process. John stated that he did not consider

campus life factors during his college choice process, but that he became interested in them after

he started college: "It was mainly just the academics I was worried about. When I came to

campus, that is when I really started to get acquainted with some of the clubs, organizations and

their programming and stuff." John also said, "I didn't really consider the LGBTQ inclusivity on

campus." John's statements to the effect that he retrospectively believed campus life and culture

factors should be an important consideration were quoted previously in relation to this theme.

Marco stated, "I just don't care for sports or extracurricular activities", thus he did not

consider campus life and culture factors because they did not interest him. Asked whether he

considered LGBT acceptance or supports, Marco answered, "No, not at all." Marco did not

express regret about omitting campus life and culture factors from consideration, and he did not

say that he would advise younger students to consider those factors. Marco explained, "I have a

community [of close friends], so it has never been like a longing for me to connect with school

organizations or support, LGBT or otherwise." Thus, Marco's discrepant data was associated

with his having a strong community of friends outside of college and with the associated feeling

of not needing to rely on campus life and culture for community and support. Marco also

reported that his primary consideration was finding a local in-state college to explore his options

and see where he could go after being unable to pursue enrollment in an art college in New York. His drive was to find affordable opportunities nearby his support network to get him going.

Theme 4: Family and Community Background Factors Were Considered

All participants contributed to this theme. Participants cited three family and community background factors as significant considerations in their college choice process. First, most participants indicated that their relationships with their family and community determined whether they wanted to attend college far from or close to home. Second, almost all participants considered family advice and expectations as factors influencing their choice to attend college and how they engaged in the college choice process. Third, family resources influenced the extent to which participants needed to take the factor of college cost into consideration. Thus, participants experienced the college choice factors of location, cost, and motivation to attend as determined through their consideration of family and community background factors.

Cole reported an experience similar to Liam's in that he wanted his college's location to be far enough from home that he could self-actualize authentically, but close enough that he could return home at need: "I wanted something far enough away from home where I felt like I was on my own and could make my own decisions, but close enough that I could head home for holidays and breaks." His experience gave him the chance to grow and stand on his own feet with help from his family but afforded him perhaps more opportunities to grow and develop a career path.

John was one of the two participants whose relationship with his family caused him to select a college location close to home. John said of his relationship with his family,

My mom was very accepting of me. I was kind of scared to come out to her, but she was very accepting. I have two sisters who are both very accepting and then a cousin who I consider a sister, who is also in the LGBT community.

John's father passed away when John was two years old. Thus, John associated his family's acceptance of him as an openly gay man with his desire to choose a college close to home. John also stated, "I don't have a [driver's] license and I don't want to be too far from home," indicating that he preferred a school close to home to accommodate his transportation restrictions while still giving him access to family. In his case, his immediate family provides a great deal of support in terms of housing and transportation, so it was logical to decide to attend a university close to home.

Almost all participants experienced their family's resources as an influence on how they considered the cost factor during their college choice process. Liam stated, "Cost was important as I was looking at schools and making choices." Cost was important for Liam because his parents were limited in the amount of financial assistance, they could give him, so expenses not covered by scholarships would have to be covered by student loans. He indicated, "I couldn't afford to go out of state because that's double the price. My dad said, 'I would rather you have a degree and not be broke.'" John was also influenced to select an in-state college by his family's inability to assist him with higher out-of-state tuition costs:

I grew up low-income, so I didn't want to have to pay a hefty amount . . . I got back my financial aid report, and the tuition costs were pretty hefty for an out-of-state school, so I decided, okay, I'm definitely staying in-state.

Like John, Cole stated his family's lack of resources influenced his consideration of the college-choice factor of cost: "The way I was raised, I knew that money was always a concern,

and college isn't cheap. So, a major concern was the affordability of going to college." Marco also associated his consideration of the cost factor with his family's resources in stating, "The affordability was number one [consideration], seeing if financial aid would cover the costs, because of my parents' limited income." Marco said of the influence of his parents' limited resources on his college choice, "My passion was to go to art school in New York, but it was too expensive." He did change his major from art to psychology, reflecting a new career path tied to higher potential salary or the chance to research topics of interest. His selection seemed grounded in the idea of picking an affordable school before evaluating their varying program options and selecting one offered by the college.

In contrast to other participants, David's choice of college was influenced by his parents' ability and willingness to pay the costs if he selected an affordable school. According to him, "X University had a great program for teachers. My parents told me they would pay for it because it was basically the best [and] the cheapest option." This kind of support can be the most influential reason for a student to attend a program. Full coverage by parents with no loans leave a graduate free to move into research opportunities or experiences around the world that they might otherwise pass on for a job with a high enough salary to make loan payments.

Of the majority of participants who reported that their relationship with their family and community determined the college choice factor of location, six reported that they wanted to attend a college far from home or unlike home, and two reported that they wanted to attend a college close to home. Adam's desire to attend an urban college, where he expected that openly gay men would be more accepted and supported than in his rural hometown, was described in the Data Analysis section of this chapter. Alex's supportive mother was deceased, and he described his relationship with his father and community as strained since his coming-out in high school as

an openly gay man. As a result, Alex said, "I wanted to find a place [college] to be away from where I grew up and away from my father."

Liam stated, "I wanted to get away from my folks and the area I grew up in," but added that he wanted his college to be located close enough to home to make home accessible at need: "Far enough away from home, but not too far . . . the location, it's like [redacted] hours from home, so I feel I'm away, but when I want to come home, I can do it relatively easily." Liam's experience differed from Adam's and Alex's in that the lack of acceptance he experienced as an openly gay man at home only came from his community, rather than from his community and family: "My community growing up was very right-wing, not very accepting folk. I didn't want to be there." This provides insight into the experience and on the challenges openly gay men face in terms of social safety and acceptance. For some, a supportive family is not enough if the larger community is extremely conservative.

Family background and expectations were a consideration of a majority of participants. Those who reported family was a major influence reported consistently communicated expectations of attending college were a major part of their family's influence. Alex described his mother's positive influence on his decision to engage in the college choice process in stating,

> My mother was very influential, she got her associates and became a nurse. She really considered that as part of who she was and as her vocation. She let me know that college was important, and that it was expected I would go to college. My mom was probably the most influential overall, of anyone . . . I knew my mother had the expectation that I would graduate high school and go on to college. So that is what kept me motivated as far as my decision.

Like Alex, Zander reported that his parents influenced him both by modeling the attainment of higher education and through the consistent expectation that he would also pursue postsecondary education: "With my parents being a doctor and a nurse, college was always talked about and something that you planned for with them."

Brent also reported the parental expectation that he would attend college was a constant during his childhood and adolescence. Brent emphasized that his parents' influence took the form of a consistently communicated expectation rather than overt pressure:

I can always remember mom and dad talking about going to college. It was important to do your best and get good grades so that you can get into a good college. It wasn't so much pressure to get good grades, but an expectation . . . So, the plan was that I would go to college, from an early age.

Greg described how parental expectations influenced his decision to engage in the college choice process in saying, "College was talked about a lot growing up . . . I don't think I ever thought that not going to college was a choice. It was just an understood expectation in my family."

In contrast to Brent, Liam described a combination of parental expectation and overt pressure as influencing him to engage in the college choice process even though he did not feel inclined to do so: "My parents kept bugging me about it . . . at the end of the day, it was a given that I was going to college. It wasn't a choice: 'You are going to college, figure it out.'" Although Liam's parents pressured him, he reported that his own disinclination to engage in the college choice process caused him to postpone it until the "last minute," thereby contributing to the stress ("I felt really scared") he reported.

In summary, participants considered the factors of their own motivation to engage in the college choice process, college location, and college cost. The participants who reported considering each of those factors reported that their considerations were decisively influenced by their family and community backgrounds. College location preferences were attributed to the quality of participants' relationships, as openly gay men, with their families and communities. Cost considerations were influenced primarily by family resources. Motivation to attend college was attributed primarily to parents' consistent expression throughout participants' childhoods and adolescence of the expectation of college attendance.

Research Question 3

RQ3 was: What information/resources did gay, cisgender male, undergraduate student participants use or access in their college choice process? Two of the themes identified during data analysis were used to address this question. The first of these themes was: (Theme 5) information from colleges was accessed and used. The second RQ3 theme was: (Theme 6) resources in the home and high school were accessed and used.

Theme 5: Information from Colleges Was Accessed and Used

All participants contributed to this theme. The most frequently accessed resource, reported by almost all participants, was online materials on university websites. Adam's experiences of anxiety during the college choice process and his regret that he did not learn more about his college choices were associated with his limiting his research about the colleges: "I Googled information about colleges and looked at college and university websites. That was pretty much it." Liam primarily referenced online resources from the colleges: "Obviously their [the colleges'] websites, but I also looked at some of their [on-campus clubs] Facebook pages, and some of their student club pages." Marco reported that he relied primarily on college-

sourced online information and physical mailings: "The bulk of my research was done online. I would [also] get information through the mail. The universities, they send out these information pamphlets and brochures."

Reliance on college-sourced, web-based materials was not associated with the confidence participants experienced during their college-choice process. Sam reported a high level of confidence: "I felt good about my decisions. I looked at the information, weighed my options, and I think I made the right decision." Sam also reported that his primary references were college websites and mailings: "I reviewed online materials and college and university websites. Mainly their websites." Zander also reported a high level of confidence and stated that he conducted his research by referencing, "Mainly information online, as that was the easiest and most convenient way to get the information I was looking for."

Most of the participants visited the campuses of colleges they were considering. A distinction appeared between participants who reported confidence and participants who reported lack of confidence. Members of both groups visited campuses for guided prospective-student tours. However, participants who reported confidence also tended to report that their choice was strongly influenced by their campus visit, while participants who reported a lack of confidence tended not to describe their campus visit as a highly influential source of information. Zander reported that he felt confidence and certainty during his college choice process, and he also described his campus visits and tour as having a strong effect on him:

> Visiting the different campuses helped a lot, so that I could see what the schools were
> like and what they had to offer. Campus tours helped too! What really helped clarify
> things for me was one event at the campus visit, and time to explore with Student
> Activities and Organizations, at a "Meet and Greet" Event as part of their campus visit

program. I could definitely see myself involved in some of those activities and organizations.

Notable in Zander's just-quoted response was his emphasis on the experience of visiting the campus as significant or even decisive for him ("really helped clarify things"), and his statement that he could "really see himself" becoming involved with some of the activities and organizations he was exposed to during the visit. Thus, the clarity Zander achieved during his college choice process was associated with his ability to imaginatively project himself into an active role in campus life, as John's responses also suggested. Consistent with those responses, John described his campus visit as having a profound effect on him through its facilitation of imaginative projection, and this effect was associated with the certainty and confidence he reported experiencing during his college choice process: "When I went on that tour at Y University, I fell in love with it. And I knew that it was going to be Y University. I was going to be okay. I could call this home."

Cole, who reported confidence, also described his campus visit as decisive: "My parents were right: you can only learn so much from the mailings and information on the internet. The campus visits really gave me the opportunity to see other people like me on campus." Cole's use of the campus visits to imaginatively project himself into a positive college experience there was suggested by his statement that he was able to see people with whom he identified ("people like me"). Again, the use of information from college websites shifts to focus on the presence of a visible LGBT community that the applicant can join to socialize with other LGBT people. It can be hard to guess from a website alone if LGBT people are visible in their participation of campus life.

In contrast, the participants who reported a lack of confidence during their college choice process did not indicate that their college visits were important to them. Within this group of participants, Adam was an exception who proved the rule. Adam reported that he did not feel certain or confident during his college choice process. He went on one campus visit that affected him significantly by enabling him to imaginatively project himself into campus life: "I could actually see myself there going to school, living there, and having a life there. That made the process a little more real to me." Adam said of this experience, "That was pretty important." However, Adam was not accepted at the college he visited. Instead, he attended X University, of which he stated, "I never actually went on any official tours or campus visit programs at X University."

Alex also reported a lack of confidence during the college choice process. Alex did not indicate that his campus visits influenced him significantly, and his description of the experiences was limited to reporting the itinerary:

I did do a couple of college visits. Some of my friends and I went to some kind of recruitment events. They weren't big events, but you got to meet people, tour the campus, see their housing options, meet with faculty, and attend a sporting event.

A few participants reported that they talked with students and staff from colleges in which they were interested during their college choice process. The pattern that emerged in this small group was that the two participants who reported confidence, Brent and Greg, used their discussions with college faculty and staff to enhance their ability to project themselves imaginatively into the campus environment. Greg stated:

During my time on campus, I got to talk with the Athletic department about being a LGBT athlete on their campus and the programs and support and resources they provided

to student athletes. I got to meet with students who were involved with LBGT organizations on campus and what it was like for them to be LGBT on their campus. It was good to compare the information from social media, with the people on the actual campus and ask questions and get their honest responses.

Notable in Greg's response was his report that during his conversation with a representative of the Athletic Department, and with LGBT students, his focus was on learning "what it was like" to be an LGBT student on the campus.

Liam, who reported a lack of confidence, reported a different experience of talking to students and staff:

When the people came from all the different colleges, representing different schools, being able to talk to the college representatives, students attending those schools, ask questions and learn about their programs, academics, Greek life, and talking about their college and their experiences [affected me]. That helped to get me to start thinking and helped for it to sink in that I needed to start looking at schools and making some decisions since there were a lot of schools out there and I didn't know very much.

In Greg's response, he indicated that his focus was on finding out what it was like for a person of his identity to engage in the activities that interested him in a specific college in which he was already interested. In Liam's response, he indicated that the effect of speaking to students and faculty from a variety of colleges was not to enable him to imaginatively project himself into those schools, but to make him realize the gaps in his knowledge of his college choice options. Thus, although Liam described the experience as positive, his response suggested that its positive, motivating influence came through its exacerbation of his anxiety.

Theme 6: Resources in the Home and High School Were Accessed and Used

All participants contributed to this theme. The most frequently reported resource accessed at home was advice and guidance from family. Brent provided a representative response in stating that his parents gave him significant freedom during his college choice process, but that they also monitored his progress in a supportive rather than critical way:

> My parents told me they would support me in my decision-making about what college or university to attend. But they required me to talk with them about my thoughts and why I was looking at specific schools. I think they wanted to make sure that I was making informed decisions and had researched the schools. I know they trusted me, but they wanted to make sure I wasn't going somewhere because someone else was going there, or because of winning sports teams. I know they were looking out for me . . . They made sure I knew about the schools before I decided to visit, then visited the campuses, and then talked with people at the different schools' students and staff to be able to make an informed decision of where I thought I could be successful and the school that would support me in getting my degree.

> Zander, who also reported confidence, provided a response that corroborated Brent's, stating in part, "It meant a lot to have their help and perspective. They helped me to navigate through information processes, talking things out, listening, and in my decision-making." Cole also reported confidence. He said of his parents' active involvement in his college choice process, "My parents were involved, for sure! I mean, they talked to everyone, my siblings, extended family, neighbors, family friends who had kids who had gone to college, my high school counselor, and they talked with me as well."

A distinction appeared between participants who reported confidence and participants who reported uncertainty. Uncertain participants reported that their parents provided oversight and motivation, but that they were not actively engaged in monitoring the participant's progress in the way that confident participants' parent were.

Indeed, participants who reported a lack of confidence tended to report more passive or reactive family involvement. Marco, who reported a lack of certainty during his college choice process, said that his father was not involved and that his mother's involvement was limited and reactive:

> She helped, you know, on applications. Or if I needed a copy of a bill or some kind of document. She would do as much as she could with work and family. But as I mentioned before, the energy just felt more like passive with her.

David also reported experiencing uncertainty during his college choice process, and he said of his parents' role that it was supportive but passive: "My parents, they made sure I knew I could use them as a resource for the process. I did the application on my own, but they were very supportive when I made the decision." David said during the college choice process, "I think that was me alone who really influenced that decision," which was tied to his feelings of complete independence.

Another strong distinction emerged in the association of participants who reported confidence with positive experiences of assistance from school counselors, and the association of participants who reported and anxiety and uncertainty with negative experiences with school counselors. Most participants reported that they accessed or attempted to access school counselors as a source of information. Of the five of those participants who described themselves as confident during their college choice process, all reported positive experiences of school

counselors. Brent, who reported confidence, used emphatic language in describing his school counselor: "I had a great college counselor in high school that helped me learn how to look at schools, how to look at the information in their college viewbooks like student-to-faculty ratio, size of classes, [and] types of scholarships available." Greg reported confidence and said of his high school's strong college counselor services, "I had it [the college choice process] pretty easy, as our high school had a great counseling department, and had a lot of information on colleges." He explained that "They let me gather my information and were there to answer questions or help me to answer questions that I had."

Of the participants who reported uncertainty and anxiety as well as high school counselor access, all reported negative experiences with school counselors. Most participants who reported uncertainty indicated that the school counselors in their high schools were too busy to be of much assistance. Alex reported that he received little assistance from his high school's counselors, who focused their attention almost exclusively on the most at-risk students:

> We did have guidance counselors in high school, but they were so focused on kids who were struggling to graduate. They didn't really focus on the rest of us, I mean I was in the top 15% of my graduating class. I met with them once, I think it was towards the end of my junior year, and she said what you want to do? She gave me a few handouts to read over, and I never went back.

Steve reported a lack of confidence and said of his high school, "We had guidance counselors, but they were horrible. They were just the worst," because they tended to impede students' progress toward college through rigid deadlines for submitting materials to receive their assistance. Counselors also discouraged interest in any college other than the two local ones with which they were most familiar.

Summary

Three research questions were used to guide this study. RQ1 was: How did gay, cisgender male, undergraduate student participants experience the college choice process? The theme used to address this question was: students who took more care in researching colleges reported more positive experiences. All participants contributed data to this theme. The participants reported that they experienced a variety of feelings during the college choice process. The sample in this study was evenly divided between participants who reported that they experienced a strong sense of confidence and certainty during the college choice process, and participants who reported that they experienced strong feelings of confusion, anxiety, and uncertainty. The common quality of the college choice experience across participants was that the feelings associated with it were strong ones. No participants reported that they experienced the college choice process as unremarkable. The factor that most clearly distinguished participants who experienced strong feelings of certainty and confidence from those who experienced anxiety and uncertainty was the significantly greater amount of effort that the confident participants put into researching colleges.

RQ2 was: What factors/variables did gay, cisgender male, undergraduate student participants consider in the college choice process? Three of the cross-case themes identified during data analysis were relevant to addressing this question. The first RQ2 theme was: academic and career factors were considered. Almost all participants contributed to this theme. These participants reported that a primary consideration was whether their intended program of study would be a pathway to employment. However, the participants who contributed to this theme varied greatly in the degree of importance they assigned to academic and career factors during their college choice process. Half of the participants did not regard these factors as

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sufficiently important to conduct research into the available programs of study, beyond confirming that the colleges they applied to granted degrees in the fields they intended to study.

The second RQ2 theme was: campus life and culture factors were considered. Most participants contributed to this theme, and two participants provided discrepant data. The feature of campus life and culture that the largest majority of participants considered was LGBT acceptance and access to an LGBT community that was supported rather than marginalized in the college community. These participants indicated that a campus culture accepting of LGBT students was important to them because they did not want to attend a school where they would feel pressured to hide their sexual orientation. They wanted their authentic selves to be accepted and supported. The campus-culture factor referenced by the second-highest number of participants was that the college should feel like a cohesive community that accepted and supported all of its members. A few participants reported that the availability of extracurricular activities and clubs was a factor they considered when choosing a college.

The third RQ2 theme was: family and community background factors were considered. All participants contributed to this theme. Participants reported that they considered the factors of their own motivation to engage in the college choice process, college location, and college cost. The participants who cited those factors as significant reported that their considerations were decisively influenced by their family and community backgrounds. College location preferences were attributed to the quality of participants' relationships, as openly gay men, with their families and communities. Cost considerations were influenced primarily by family resources. Motivation to attend college was attributed primarily to parents' consistent expression throughout participants' childhoods and adolescence of the expectation of college attendance.

RQ3 was: What information/resources did gay, cisgender male, undergraduate student participants use or access in their college choice process? Two of the themes identified during data analysis were used to address this question. The first of these themes was: information from colleges was accessed and used. All participants contributed to this theme. The most frequently accessed resource was online materials on university websites. Reliance on college-sourced, web-based materials was not associated with the confidence participants experienced during their college-choice process.

Most participants visited the campuses of colleges they were considering. A distinction appeared between participants who reported confidence and participants who reported lack of confidence. Members of both groups visited campuses for guided, prospective-student tours. However, participants who reported confidence also tended to report that their choice was strongly influenced by their campus visit, while participants who reported a lack of confidence tended not to describe their campus visit as a highly influential source of information. The strong, clarifying experience of campus visits for participants who reported confidence was associated with the visits' enabling them to imaginatively project themselves into positive experiences at the college. Participants who reported a lack of confidence and who undertook campus visits did not report this experience.

The second RQ3 theme was: resources in the home and high school were accessed and used. All participants contributed to this theme. The most frequently reported resource accessed at home was advice and guidance from family. A distinction that appeared between participants who reported confidence and participants who reported uncertainty was that confident participants described their parents as engaging in active monitoring and assistance, while uncertain participants described their parents' role as passive or reactive. Another strong

distinction emerged in the association of participants who reported confidence with positive experiences of assistance from school counselors, and the association of participants who reported and anxiety and uncertainty with negative experiences with school counselors. Chapter 5 is a discussion of these findings, with interpretation, implications, and recommendations.

Summary of Results

After conducting semi-structured interviews with 12 participants, the analysis revealed six major themes. Research question one was addressed by theme 1, "Academic and Career Factors Were Considered." Research question two was addressed by three major themes, theme two, theme three, and theme four. Theme two was that "Academic and Career Factors Were Considered," the biggest being the likelihood that an intended course of study would lead to a career. Theme three was that "Campus Life and Culture Factors Were Considered," with a significant emphasis on university LGBT acceptance and access to a supportive LGBT community. Theme four was "Family and Community Background Factors Were Considered," with all participants reporting that familial and community backgrounds were influential forces in the decision-making process. Finally, research question three was addressed by two major themes, theme five and theme six. Theme five was that "Information from Colleges Was Accessed and Used," with online materials such as university websites being the most commonly referenced source of information on the schools. Theme six was that "Resources in the Home and High School Were Accessed and Used," mainly in the form of taking advice from family and high school s.

Examining these themes revealed four significant trends in the participant's college choice process. First, familial input and one's community background played a critical role in students' considerations during the college choice process. Second, the quality of participant's

relationships as openly gay men substantially influenced the student's college location

preference. Third, familial resources were a major determining factor in all financial

considerations. Finally, student's motivation to attend college was primarily influenced by

familial expectations that they would attend a university. It is important to note the consideration

toward LGBTQ acceptance on campus, as this can be a deciding factor for many LGBTQ youth,

especially those who are yet under researched and highly visible as a sexual minoritized student,

because of a sense of not only belonging but also personal safety. Colleges must realize the

impact that displaying LGBTQ acceptance might have on some students seeking a safe and

welcoming environment.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The results of the present study support various observations and assumptions from existing research and add new details to the understanding of the college choice experience for cisgender gay male college participants. The following section will compare the major themes discovered from the interviews with the existing literature on the topic in the context of the research questions that said theme addressed.

Research Question 1

As previously discussed in Chapter 4, the question posed in research question one was addressed by theme one, "Students who took more care in researching colleges reported more positive experiences." Specifically, the greater amount of effort a respondent placed in the college choice process (e.g., researching schools, developing personal criteria, applying early), the greater confidence the respondent felt during the college choice process. Directly answering the question of how participants experienced the college choice process, this observation also revealed the importance of preparation for a positive college choice experience. This important role of preparation in the college choice process is unsurprising, as one could easily expect students to feel less confident and more stressed about an endeavor when they fail to give it adequate effort. Furthermore, several findings from participants support the existing literature on the importance of preparation for a positive college choice experience (Kirst & Bracco, 2004; Perna et al., 2005).

Previous investigations found that declining student drive and personal motivation to attend university are commonly linked to students lacking academic preparation (Bergerson, 2009; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; McDonough, 1997; Terenzini et al., 2001; Walpole, 2003). Researchers also found that improving the quality of college preparation resources and

increasing the accessibility of said resources can increase students' demand for enrollment (Perna et al., 2005). The reason this relationship between quality accessible resources and student enrollment demands would exist may be because such materials would make students more confident in their choice to attend a specific school, ergo increasing the demand for enrollment space. What motivated some cisgender gay male participants to select a school might be tied to varying traits related to personal safety and acceptance instead of other academic features of the academy in question (Draughn et al., 2002; Rankin, 2003), and could greatly impact their utilization of student resources.

Finally, students commented on their research of colleges in relation to their personal safety and acceptance on campus, looking for evidence on campus and on campus websites that LGBT students are supported publicly. The concept of personal safety and acceptance was a factor that was part of their process for researching schools, adding to the long-standing interest in college preparation seen in the literature. A review of the literature supports students having been drawn to campuses that display LGBT safety and have a system for identifying LGBT safe faculty (Wexelbaum, 2018). The literature contains a large amount of research on college preparation, examining the effectiveness of college preparation courses and the impact of community/school characteristics on student preparation (Bergerson, 2009; Perna et al., 2008; Pitre, 2006; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). However, these researchers emphasized the examination of variations in access to information and preparation materials across socio-economic backgrounds, with little attention given to the subjective experience of the students in question (Bergerson, 2009; Perna et al., 2008; Pitre, 2006; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). The findings of this study offer insight into the college choice process used by some cisgendered gay male participants by providing detailed descriptions of students' subjective experiences during

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the college choice process and how these experiences varied based on the level of student preparation.

Research Question 2

As previously discussed in Chapter Four, the question posed in research question two was addressed by theme two, theme three, and theme four. Although there are likely more factors at play in the college choice process in general, these three themes encompass the most prominent factors found in the participants interviewed: academic and career factors, campus life and culture factors, and family and community background. The impact of previous research about campuses (Garvey et al., 2017), family and preexisting community support (Attinasi, 1989; Litten & Hall, 1989; Manski et al., 1983), the thought put into academic and career factors (Borus & Carpenter, 1984; Hearn, 1984; St. John, 1990), and tolerance was prominent in this study and in the literature (Wexelbaum, 2018).

Theme 2: "Academic and Career Factors Were Considered"

One of the most common justifications for pursuing higher education is the assumption that doing so is necessary to enter a rewarding career. Given this assumption, it is unsurprising that students would consider the suitability of a school's program as a pathway to a career when deciding what school to attend. In addition, this theme supports existing observations on the topic of college choice. For instance, in Taulke-Johnson's (2010) study, 17 gay male undergraduate students were interviewed as part of a qualitative investigation into the factors that influenced their college choice process. Of the factors reported by the participants, "academic issues" were frequently cited as a significant point of consideration when making their college decisions (Bergerson, 2009; Garvey et al., 2017; Manski et al., 1983; Moogam et al., 1999; Paulsen, 1990; St. John, 1990; Tierney, 1982). The identification of academic and career

elements was present in the participants interviews and reflects a major concern of most college students selecting colleges with their parents, and as such was not a surprising find among the data.

Theme 3: "Campus Life and Culture Factors Were Considered"

As discussed in Chapter 1, campus climate is typically defined as "the cumulative attitudes, behaviors, and standards of employees and students concerning access for, inclusion of, and levels of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential" (Rankin, 2005, p. 17). Although such concerns are likely of some relevance to all students, the sensitive nature of being in a sexual minoritized group would make such concerns even more salient. As such, it is no surprise that the vast majority of participants reported that these concerns played a significant role in their college decision, an observation in line with those from Taulke-Johnson's (2010) study. Other cultures and ethnicities face similar worries when deciding which college to attend (Strayhorn et al., 2008; Teranishi et al., 2004). Ensuring the safety and freedom from harassment, violence, or intimidation is a critical part of selecting an institution for individuals from communities frequently targeted by discrimination.

Theme 4: "Family and Community Background Factors Were Considered"

Finally, all participants reported familial and community background factors as significant points of consideration. Specifically, all participants reported that their school considerations were critically influenced by their family and community backgrounds, a finding that is in line with existing research. For example, previous observations suggest that advice from schoolteachers, family, and friends significantly influence students' college preferences, as found in this study (Brooks, 2003; Taulke-Johnson, 2010). Furthermore, participants from the present study reported that the quality of their familial relationships influenced their preferences

for a school's distance from home and that cost considerations were based on family resources, both of these findings support existing literature (Bergerson, 2009; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; McDonough, 1997; Terenzini et al., 2001; Walpole, 2003). This is a very common theme among college students, as the support and encouragement of immediate family is often a predictor of college-level success.

A cisgender openly gay male having a great deal of family support in searching for colleges is a relatively new concept and being able to interview participants from the LGBT community requires ensuring the participants are safe and remain anonymous. Students who are openly gay and have enough family support to engage successfully in enrolling in a college represent a subpopulation of the LGBT community that could arguably have reduced psychological risk for engaging with this research than someone whose family is shunning them in the present moment, and so were appropriate to sample for this research. It is not surprising that students with supportive family are able to engage in higher ed, although there are noticeable differences in their experiences related to what LGBT students look for in colleges (Garvey et al., 2017; Wexelbaum, 2018). Further research will need to tread carefully, possibly using snowball sampling, to find participants for research studies related to more marginalized LGBT groups.

Research Question 3

As previously discussed in Chapter 4, the question posed in RQ3 was addressed by theme five and theme six.

Theme 5: "Information from Colleges Was Accessed and Used"

One of the most important goals of a university website is to provide comprehensive information about a school and its programs. As such, it is unsurprising that all participants

reported using schools' websites to collect information on the schools. Another primary source of college information was guided campus tours. Although not all participants reported these visits as influential on their decisions, those who reported confidence in their decisions frequently cited the tours as highly influential sources of information. These participants described the tours as clarifying experiences that helped them set their expectations for the quality of the college experience, they would receive at a given school. This aligns with Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice framework, which emphasized the importance of students collecting information on schools from a variety of sources.

Theme 6: "Resources in the Home and High School Were Accessed and Used"

It stands to reason that, similar to any major decision, students in the college choice process would tend to seek the advice of more knowledgeable others from their preexisting social support networks (Alwin & Otto, 1977; Attinasi, 1989; Bergerson, 2009; Borus & Carpenter, 1984; Hearn, 1984; Lee & Ekstrom, 1987; Litten & Hall, 1989, Manski et al., 1983; St. John, 1990; Taulke-Johnson, 2010). As such, it is unsurprising that all participants reported that the access to and utilization of home-based resources played a pivotal role in the college choice process. Specifically, all participants reported parental advice as the primary home resource that they used. Further, the greater a participant was engaged with the college choice process, the greater the confidence the participants reported. Additionally, the more confident participants also reported more positive experiences with high school counselors than their less confident peers.

These observations all support the existing literature on the subject, as previous research has highlighted how crucial such resources are for students to make well-informed decisions during the college choice process (Gonzalez et al., 2003; Grodsky & Jones, 2007; Ikenberry &

Hartle, 1998). Specifically, previous observations suggest that students with families lacking

members with experience with higher education (Grodsky & Jones, 2007; Ikenberry & Hartle,

1998) and failing to utilize high school counselor services (Gonzalez et al., 2003) are both linked

with lower understanding of essential factors of college choice. They may not have background

information related to cost and how to get aid or apply, resulting in potentially decreased access

to college application support and experiences that create a strong academic resume.

Implications of the Findings

In the context of the existing literature on college choice, the result of this study presents

several implications worthy of discussion. The following section will discuss these implications,

beginning with a discussion on the potential social impact of these findings. This will then be

followed by a discussion of the implications for theory and application, concluding with a

discussion on the implications for research and practice.

Potential for Social Change

Today's LGBT youth in America have more opportunities than ever before, despite as

discussed in Chapter 1, the current literature on higher education for sexual minorities provides

an incomplete view of the lived experiences of these students (ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher

Education, 2001; Longerbeam et al., 2007). Specifically, research examining how these students

proceed through the college choice process, and the factors that influence this process, is sparse

(Garvey et al., 2017; Sanlo, 2004; Wexelbaum, 2018). This is despite the common assumption

that sexuality, like many background characteristics, must have some influence on the process,

perhaps analogous to the effect of socioeconomic status (Bergerson, 2009). Furthermore, it is

widely assumed that attaining a greater understanding of this dynamic between sexual

minoritized status and college choice experience would allow educators to give a better-quality experience for said students (Bergerson, 2009).

The results of this study revealed several trends that may be considered to affect positive social change, at an individual and organizational level, with regard to supporting cisgender gay male college applicants. Specifically, the themes of what factors were associated with a more positive college choice experience might be used by higher education professionals and families with gay male students to potentially increase the quality of this experience for this traditionally underserved population.

Institutions have an opportunity to continue to further explore how to remove social barriers faced by sexual minorities applying to their institutions and work to inform policy that is welcoming to LGBTQ students. These themes may offer some insight into the kinds of features that gay male students might be looking for in a college as well. For instance, the observed link between the effort these gay male participants placed in researching colleges and the participant's experience of the college choice process could be used by school counselors and family members to help cisgender gay male students during the college choice process. Some participants reported searching for careers, evidence of LGBT support, clubs, programs.

Garvey et al. (2017) designed an index for making colleges appealing to LGBT students to encourage their engagement in curricular and extra-curricular experiences. Garvey (2020) provides insight on how creating policy for better retention does involve engaging in social change activism that is pro-LGBT and leaves colleges or organizations open to criticism from hostile social elements. These practices at universities, in turn, could help boost student's confidence during the process, improving the overall quality of their experience.

Further, the identification of common factors that these students considered during the college choice process can be informative. First, this information could be used by high school counselors to help students construct priority lists to use during the selection process. Doing so would increase the likelihood that future cisgender gay male students would make the informed choice that is best for them.

Second, universities could use the information from this study to guide policy and practices to accommodate the needs and desires of potential students from the cisgender gay male population as well as present to other more inclusive or hesitant LGBT students that universities are seeking to support them. Other sexual minorities might find the universities efforts demonstrate acceptance of LGBTQ people comforting, which may support retention (Garvey, 2020) and encourage LGBT students to apply (Wexelbaum, 2018).

Similarly, identifying the information/resources that LGBTQ students are likely to use during the selection process could help universities make decisions about the kinds of information to include on their websites and discussion with applicants during tours. While students reported many similar considerations to mainstream college applications, specifically seeking an institution that presents public displays supporting LGBTQ people as a result of sexual orientation is not likely to be the concern of cisgender heterosexual people, who can safely assume support.

Implications Related to Methodology and Existing Theory

Implications for Theory

These findings are generally consistent with many of the current theories of college choice and are specifically consistent with each of the three traditional perspectives. The causal model of college choice defines internal and external factors that affect college choice but fails to

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take into consideration the importance of cultural aspects of the university in question. As described in Chapter 2, the conceptualization of the college choice process has been historically framed by three major perspectives: the sociological perspective, the psychological perspective, and the economic perspective (Paulsen, 1990).

In the sociological perspective, the emphasis was placed on the influence of a student's background on their decision to go to college (Manski et al., 1983). Studies framed by the sociological perspective have consistently found several background characteristics with significant impacts on the college choice process, influencing both a student's college predisposition and institutional choice (Attinasi, 1989; Alwin & Otto, 1977; Bergerson, 2009; Borus & Carpenter, 1984; Hearn, 1984; Lee & Ekstrom, 1987; Litten & Hall, 1989; Manski et al., 1983; St. John, 1990). The findings from the present study are consistent with the literature, where all participants reported familial and community background as major influences on their decision-making process, but also added some understanding of the process participants experienced when assessing colleges for openness and personal safety considerations. Policies relating to LGBT students could be designed with personal safety and campus climate related to LGBT support and openness more than likely, although it was not a consideration for some participants in the present study, many mentioned it and it is supported in the literature (Garvey et al., 2017; Garvey 2020; Wexelbaum, 2018).

The psychological perspective, in contrast, emphasized the influence of campus climate on student's college choice (Paulsen, 1990). Campus climate typically refers to "the cumulative attitudes, behaviors, and standards of employees and students concerning access for, inclusion of, and levels of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential" (Rankin, 2005, p. 17). As such, the psychological perspective's emphasis on campus climate is in line with the

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concerns described in theme three by participants concerned. The participants were observant regarding the visibility of LGBT students and community and the culture of the campus in terms of tolerance or acceptance of LGBT people. There can be many factors that affect college choice tied to culture we do not fully understand, so it is highlighted as a potential area for further research.

Finally, the economic perspective viewed the college choice processes as transactional in nature, with students viewing their choice of school as an investment that will eventually result in economic gain (Paulsen, 1990). From this conceptualization, it assumed that the major factors in consideration in the college choice process include the costs of enrollment and the loss of potential income while in school, weighed against the student's perceptions of the economic return they expect their education to provide, which has been supported by many researchers (Bergerson, 2009; Chapman & Jackson, 1987; Davis-Van-Atta & Carrier, 1986).

Again, these ideas of the transactional nature of college education are consistent with the factors described in theme two, including the idea that college is about academic and career choices, meaning it is essential to focus on how a certain college has the right program or pathway during the application process. However, other factors related to culture and social acceptance, or issues related to cost instead of selecting the optimal program were of greater consideration for some of the participants. More research into students from lower socioeconomic statuses and their experiences related to the stresses of paying for school must be conducted.

The importance of these three foundational perspectives to college choice research cannot be overlooked. Although no single perspective in isolation adequately explains college choice, the combination of these perspectives provides a great deal of insight into the process

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cisgendered gay male students engage in when selecting colleges, including how they research a school for typical traits like programs, sports clubs, etc., while revealing some about the anxiety that some have when searching for schools that are more accepting. This research documents the unique questions that cisgender openly gay male high school students face when selecting schools. Most average students report looking for a program that is desirable for their career goals, but the participants of this study and existing literature (Garvey et al., 2017; Garvey, 2020; Wexelbaum, 2018) report researching whether their campus supports their sexual orientation and personal safety as well.

Implications for Practice

Institutional considerations of making campuses more accessible to prospective gay male students could assist with student recruitment and retention efforts. Creating acceptance and visibility provides opportunities for connections with the campus community, which is verified by the literature and the findings of this research. Colleges might also consider exploring the index set out by Garvey et al. (2017) and the dirth of information related to creating more welcoming environments on college campuses (Garvey, 2020; Wexelbaum, 2018). As Wexelbaum (2018) uncovered, even having signs at the library to create a safe space using posters or signs can have a significant effect. These elements might combine to influence the college choice of gay male students deciding between similar institutions with similar programs they are interested in completing.

Recommendations for Future Study

Having reviewed the results of this study in the context of the research questions, limitations, and the broader literature, the author has devised three significant recommendations for future research. These recommendations include extending the current methods to other

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sexual minoritized groups, conducting a longitudinal study with high school students in the college choice process, and incorporating a control sample of majority group participants. The following section will review each of these suggestions in detail and the potential benefits such research may bring to the understanding of the topic in question.

Sample Other Sexual Minorities

Using the methods outlined in this study, the author's first recommendation is for future studies to examine the applicability of these findings to other populations. Specifically, the author recommends that future studies be conducted using sample participants from other sexual/identity minoritized groups. For instance, future studies could sample lesbian, asexual, or transgender participants to see if college choice themes are found that are similar to those found in the present study. By examining any similarities or differences in the experiences of these groups, such studies would significantly expand the understanding of the college choice experience. Furthermore, any themes discovered in such studies could potentially be used by high school counselors and universities to better understand the resources that these traditionally underserved populations require for them to make a college choice that most effectively meets their needs.

A Longitudinal Study of High School Students

Second, I recommend that future studies expand on the findings of this study via the implementation of a longitudinal study design with a sample of high school students in the college choice process. Specifically, I suggest that future studies conduct a series of interviews with high school students throughout their college choice process. The content of these interviews might be similar to the interviews in this study. In these interviews, participants should be asked about the factors they consider important to their decision, describe the process

of making their decision, and report their feelings on the process as it unfolds. Analysis of these interviews should also follow a similar phenomenological method as that employed in the present study. By following participants while they undergo the college choice process, these studies avoid the limitations of participant memory inherent in the retrospective method used in the present study. As such, the use of such a method could produce more robust descriptions of the college choice process and the individual experiences of participants than would be possible with the retrospective method of this study.

Incorporation of Majority Group Participants

Finally, I suggest that future studies modify the present protocol by including members of the majority group. Specifically, I suggest that future studies recruit cis-gendered heterosexual participants of both genders alongside sexual minoritized groups. The incorporation of such a control group brings several benefits to future studies. For instance, incorporating participants from the sexual majority group would allow future studies to examine how the college choice experience differs for each group as a function of sexual orientation/identity. Furthermore, this method would elucidate any themes that are common to all groups. Comparing the themes that differ by groups to those that remain consistent would greatly expand the understanding of college choice. Additionally, any findings from such comparisons could act as the foundations for new avenues of research into the topic. For instance, should a theme(s) be strongly consistent across all groups, new research could be done to examine why said themes, in particular, are so fundamental to the college choice process.

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